

# MYTHS AND FACTS BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR

*How India, U.S., China, and the U.S.S.R. Shaped the Outcome*

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B.Z. Khasru

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*To All Who Made It Possible*

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# A Note to the Reader

This book resulted from my search for answers to some questions related to the violent military coup in Bangladesh in 1975, a carnage marked by an unprecedented level of bloodshed in the region's recent history to bring about a change in government. Since the putsch, which took place three years after the Bengalis had etched their independence with a river of blood, I have always wondered why it happened, how it happened. Rumors were abound, but no logical explanation had emerged. Facts appeared twisted to suit the purpose of those who furnished them.

In 1988, I posed some of my questions to professor Myron Weiner, America's leading authority on Indian political studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston, where I was studying journalism at Northeastern University. He offered nothing new, but advised that I would possibly have a better insight once the State Department declassified some of its secret documents.

Early this decade, I got bits and pieces of information when some of those documents were released, but many of my questions still remained largely unanswered. My quest continued. Part of what I have uncovered in my research formed the foundation of this book. The rest I intend to offer to readers soon in another book, which will cover the details of the unsolved mystery behind the coup.

In this book, I have endeavored to explain the mysteries surrounding the war, giving details of events as they unfolded during those fateful days of 1971. In addition to answering what caused the war and how it was conducted, this book also shows how big powers see global events through the prism of their national interests, how political leaders blinded by their misguided personal ambitions plunge their people into untold miseries, and how an inaccurate reading of diplomatic subtleties leads to disastrous policies.

Despite its grounding in the events that shaped the Bangladesh Liberation War, this book narrates a tale that touches America's foray into the subcontinent as far back as the early 1940s. It was a time when many people thought Japan would occupy India, many Indians expected Britain's defeat in World War II and America sought ways to stop the Indians from falling in love with the *hara-kiri* nation in an effort to deny Japan access to India's huge reservoir of human resources and raw materials for war production.

Right from the start, the Americans labored diligently to forge compatible strategies with the Indians, but their interests often moved in divergent trajectories, creating an intriguing chapter in the region's diplomatic history covering last century's second half. Mistrust and misunderstanding marked this history, despite meticulous attempts by the actors to fathom each other's mind and formulate right approaches. For example, a diplomatic icon no less than Henry Kissinger wondered aloud whether Indira Gandhi played a shell game when the Little Lady told the Big Americans she was loathe to resort to war to end the East Pakistan crisis. At the opposite end, Sardar Swaran Singh, India's foreign minister, was baffled when Kissinger reneged on his promise to stand by New Delhi if China attacked India. To better understand America, Jawaharlal Nehru dispatched his trusted aide V.K. Krishna Menon to meet with President Dwight Eisenhower to learn what the former NATO supreme commander thought about India and its premier. Pakistan's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah's failure to properly assess intricacies of Washington workings resulted in his seeking a whopping one billion dollar aid, and his emissary M.A.H. Ispahani's utter disappointment when President Harry Truman promised a meager \$25 million.

Broadly speaking, South Asians often viewed America as a country with an imperial design out to exploit them. Still, they courted Yankee imperialism for money and arms to serve their national interests, which rarely moved in parallel with U.S. objectives.

The Americans downgraded South Asia in its entirety to a region bereft of economic potential. They, however, put it on the top as an unmatched strategic asset to combat communism. To them, losing India to communism meant surrendering entire Asia, which would constitute the most serious and threatening blow to America's security and global prominence. Washington, which had just inherited the uneasy mantle of world leadership as the sun set on the British empire, saw a foothold in Pakistan as an essential ingredient in ensuring the West's continued grip on the Middle East and its oil, the lifeblood of the West's economy.

American policymakers, however, never succeeded in constructing a rational, effective approach to challenges posed by India and Pakistan. Washington's initial attempt to keep the Indians from the clutches of an imperial Japan put itself on the wrong side of the Indian equation. Thanks to India's "extremely reactionary and self-seeking" industrialists, as Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai, British India's agent general in Washington, put it, the United States got branded as Yankee imperialism seeking to replace British imperialism. Soon after Britain's departure, India and America collided. Nehru charged that Washington sought to undermine him to advance its own foreign policy aims. Nehru's daughter – Indira Gandhi, a major player in the Bangladesh Liberation War – found the Yankee policies even more abhorrent, thanks to Nixon-Kissinger ruffling her feathers.

Similar to America's strategic goal, the Soviet Union's most important purpose to have South Asia in its fold was to ensure that the subcontinent not be used by any power against any country. From their global strategic point of view, the Russians attached enormous value to Pakistan to gain greater control over world affairs, and to strengthen their power to fight the West and China. Moscow's eye on South Asia was linked with the czarist grand vision to gain access to the warm water ports for global domination. Moscow considered America and China as potential threats to its interests in South Asia. The Soviet Union viewed the fight for influence in the region as a zero-sum game: to curb Chinese and U.S. influence, Soviet influence must expand. To this end, the Soviet Union urged India to take diplomatic and economic decisions to help reduce American influence in South Asia. Russia perceived that the hold over South Asia, the Persian Gulf as well as Iran and Turkey was vital for its strategic interests. So, it courted India as a reliable partner. India, for its part, found Moscow as a neutralizer against China.

China's policy during the Bangladesh Liberation War was guided mainly by its adversarial relations with India. Beijing accused India of interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs, but its real concern was New Delhi's geopolitical strategy, which China considered hegemonistic. China also saw India as a Soviet proxy. Yet China backed off from military intervention in support of West Pakistan because Beijing abhorred risking a major war to bail out a beleaguered friend. China was cowered by the Soviet threat; it simply did not want to overplay its hand.

India, which suffered the trauma of British subjugation, used caution in its approach to Washington right from the beginning, even before Britain was to lose its most glittering jewel in the crown. India's founding leaders, who made a tryst with freedom based on their ideological bent of high moral ground, placed honor over pragmatism. They deliberately maintained a safe distance from the United States, but often sided with those whom Washington considered enemies. America resented seeing both Nehru and Gandhi on the Red lap.

Pakistan, which resulted from a power struggle between two of India's most prominent sons, found itself preoccupied with the fight for survival

since its birth. Its quest for allies premised on one cardinal factor – to fend off its archrival, India. So, Pakistan's rulers tied the knot with America, but they never succeeded in explaining this alliance to their countrymen to win their support. Pakistan's main issue in 1971 boiled down to the power relationship between the two wings. Sheikh Mujib wanted full autonomy. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto simply pursued his misguided dream to rule Pakistan. Yahya Khan vowed not to preside over Pakistan's demise. Pakistan's military unwittingly invited an end to their country by using brutal force in Dhaka and subsequently terrorizing East Pakistan's entire population. The generals miscalculated their ability to put down the rebellion. Yahya Khan erred gravely in reading India's intention. He blundered by ignoring America's advice to move quickly toward a political solution.

Despite Mujib's firm resolve on autonomy – and possible separation if he did not get his way – Kissinger termed his posture as a "negotiating ploy". Evidence of his intentions, however, were apparent in approaches Mujib had made to the United States and other diplomats, urging them to help avoid a civil war if he unilaterally declared independence. Pakistan's uncertain situation had forced America to walk a very narrow tightrope. America realized the crisis "could over time have far-reaching implications" for U.S. interests in South Asia. Richard Nixon's aides had advocated a "more neutral stance toward" Mujib "as a hedge against the day when we might have to deal with an independent East Pakistan". They considered Mujib friendly toward the United States. Nixon, however, did not see Mujib the way his advisers did. "Not yet-correct," the president wrote on the margin of a memorandum Kissinger had sent to him, describing Mujib as pro-American. Nixon advised against taking "any position which encourages secession". Discouraged by America, Mujib backed off from full independence. He feared a unilateral declaration of independence would certainly invite a direct confrontation with Yahya's military – too great a risk for him to face without America's backing. But he remained steadfast on maximum autonomy.

As Jinnah once wielded his sword of the two-nation theory to carve out a place for Muslims in undivided India, exactly the same way Mujib sought to use his six-point plan to establish the rights of the Bengalis in united Pakistan. Neither met with success, but both made history. Had the Congress Party and Nehru conceded Jinnah's demands, Pakistan would have remained just a fanciful dream in some Muslim minds. Likewise, had Pakistan's military and Bhutto accepted Mujib's six points, Bangladesh would not have seen the daylight. By rejecting the Cabinet Mission plan, the Congress Party threw Jinnah over the edge into his unsought dreamland – Pakistan. By committing the massacre in Dhaka, the Pakistanis propelled the Bengalis into writing their independence with blood, and Mujib found himself in his unexpected homeland – Bangladesh.

B.Z. Khasru

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# Preface

On 28 February 1971, at 9 a.m., U.S. Ambassador Joseph Farland stepped out of his car in front of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's house in Dhaka. The Bengali leader, basking in the glory of his landslide victory in Pakistan's first general election, greeted the envoy at his car and escorted him into his residence.

During an hour-long conversation, Mujib urged Farland to exert maximum influence with "those who would use force of arms to keep" the Bengalis in a colonial status. Farland had expected Mujib to raise the issue of East Pakistan's recognition as an independent nation, but he did not.

Farland had met President Yahya Khan on 25 February. Yahya told the envoy that many in West Pakistan suspected that America supported East Pakistan's independence. Yahya's intelligence told him Farland had met Mujib when he visited Dhaka in January. Farland protested he did not.

Based on intelligence reports, America concluded early March that unless a compromise formula was found, secession by the Bengalis or separation of the two wings by mutual consent had become real possibilities. But Washington's ability to influence the course of these events was very limited. Moreover, the United States decided a unified Pakistan served its interests better. So, its objective was to promote an orderly transition from a military regime to an effective parliamentary system that would adopt foreign and domestic policies in line with U.S. aims.

Pakistan's uncertain internal situation forced Washington to walk a narrow tightrope. Washington faced a decision whether to take a more neutral stance toward Mujib as a hedge against the day when it might have to deal with an independent East Pakistan. A realistic assessment argued for adjusting America's posture toward Mujib, whom Nixon's aides considered pro-American. But Nixon doubted Mujib's pro-American credentials. He advised his advisers against supporting East Pakistan's independence. His advisers, accordingly, adopted a do-nothing-now posture toward East Pakistan.

But soon America realized the Bengalis were marching on a road toward independence. What was needed to keep at least a vestige of Pakistan's unity was a solution that "would give something to Bhutto, something to Mujib and something to Yahya and the army".

One such solution was to form a confederation. Under such a scenario, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto would become West Pakistan's prime minister. Mujib would lead Bangladesh. Yahya would hold the confederate presidency, while the military would receive its sustenance from both the wings.

But this solution posed a big problem in foreign affairs. Mujib and Bhutto were diametrically opposite in their views on relations to India. Mujib favored warm ties with New Delhi, but Bhutto's eyes were fixed on Kashmir. On top of all this, Yahya considered East Pakistan's autonomy as a half step towards full independence. But America saw no other feasible alternative.

However, a ray of hope emerged when Mujib backed off from a unilateral declaration of independence of East Pakistan on 7 March. Despite an open rift with West Pakistan, Mujib apparently kept the possibility of remaining within one Pakistan under a loose federation. Or so, at least the Americans thought. Mujib wanted to work out with Yahya some political deal to avoid bloodshed, satisfy Bengali aspirations and preserve some vestige of a link with Pakistan. He sought America's help to bring about a solution.

Despite their reluctance to support East Pakistan's independence, the Americans had begun seriously thinking that soon they might have to deal with a new South Asian nation. Based on this assumption, they started examining what they would face if East Pakistan separated from West Pakistan. An independent East Pakistan would face formidable economic and political problems. Its leaders would be hard pressed to satisfy people's aspirations. A new West Pakistan, on the other side, would continue to be hostile toward India, creating trouble for its security and economic progress, because of excessive defense expenditures.

To deal with these contending forces, the Americans outlined three alternative options but agreed that unless and until separation was certain, any shift in their position would be against America's continuing interest. They were concerned that their encouragement of East Pakistan's separatism would quickly get back to West Pakistan and deepen suspicions among the West Pakistanis that Washington wanted to split their country.

Washington felt that Yahya was doing his best to bring Mujib and Bhutto closer. Yahya knew very well when he postponed the parliamentary session that his move could provoke a backlash in East Pakistan. He figured the alternative to the postponement would be even worse. His two main options were to postpone the session and risk an immediate confrontation with East Pakistan, or to hold the session and risk an immediate fight with his army.

Yahya figured he would inevitably provoke a confrontation with the East Pakistanis in a few months because he would eventually have to reject an autonomy constitution. So, he could not compromise with Mujib or move closer to Bhutto without jeopardizing his own power base and risking his ouster by hardline military elements. In short, Yahya decided to risk a confrontation with East Pakistan in the slight hope that if he pushed all the parties to the brink, a compromise might evolve from their coming to grips with the consequences of dividing Pakistan. Given the sentiment within West Pakistan's political-military establishment, he saw no other realistic choice.

To the Americans, Pakistan's major political figures represented a cocktail of ideologies and characters. Yahya, Mujib and Bhutto possessed different ideological outlooks. Yahya, whose power base was the military and the economic elite who opposed any compromise with Bhutto to avoid an "equitable distribution of wealth", was fairly conservative. Bhutto, a leftist and populist, did not want to accommodate East Pakistan because he wanted to control a strong central government. Yahya and Bhutto, however, had one thing in common – both opposed Mujib, who remained steadfast on his autonomy plan.

The key to resolution of the autonomy issue was Yahya Khan. He had accepted the need to work with Mujib, but this decision was doubtless predicated on a belief that the West Pakistanis would be well-represented by centrists who could work with the Awami League and protect West Pakistani interests. Bhutto had destroyed this belief.

Mujib's action confused the Americans, who initially felt that the Bengali leader had possibly slammed the door on the East-West compromise by dumping Yahya's planned conference. However, they were not entirely sure what Mujib actually wanted as he kept the door open for negotiations.



As Mujib stepped up the political pressure, Yahya put his military machine into action. Washington received reports of troop movement from West Pakistan to East, with indications that the military wanted to strike against the East Pakistan leaders. Washington had ruled out an attack, but now that assumption seemed less and less true. The Central Intelligence Agency's latest report warned of a violent reaction from the Bengalis if Islamabad cracked down.

Under the circumstances, Yahya apparently had only two options – either one would further weaken Pakistan's already fragile unity. If he acquiesced in Mujib's step, he would forfeit his martial law powers, at least in the East, and would be hard pressed to retain them in the West. If the president or the military generals decided "to resist Mujib's action by force, East Pakistan would be engulfed in a struggle between the military and the Bengali nationalists, the outcome of which can only be eventual independence of Bengal and the breaking of all ties with West Pakistan – unless, as seems unlikely in the long run, the army can successfully contain a rebellion," American officials concluded.

Yahya found himself between a rock and hard place not only in East Pakistan but also in West, with Bhutto demanding power be given to the majority parties in each wing. Bhutto's speech in Karachi calling for power transfer, in fact, might have triggered Mujib's action. Bhutto had decided that his chances of getting power in West Pakistan were best enhanced by a split of Pakistan – total or nearly so. However, Bhutto had less opportunity to act than Mujib because the army was strong in the West and could probably contain a rebellion. The events cast further doubt on Pakistan's continued unity. Yahya's response would be the most important determining factor.

Yahya did not have much faith in the parliamentary system, nor did he hold Pakistan's politicians, especially Bhutto, in high esteem. He had decided early on against handing over power to Mujib under a constitution based on the Awami League's six-point program. He smelled Pakistan's demise in it.

Mujib was unwilling to divide Pakistan. This explains why he did not prepare a contingency plan to face Yahya's impending military action. He never expected the kind of brutality that Yahya unleashed in East Pakistan. His political experience had taught him a crackdown, even if it happened, would be ephemeral, as happened after Ayub's coup in 1958 and Yahya's take-over in 1969. The chain of events in East Pakistan in 1971 closely resembled the pattern of 1969. Everything looked to him exactly the same as two years ago. The imposition of martial law, ban on political activity and arrests of political leaders as well as shooting protesting students had become staples of Pakistan's politics.

On 3 March 1971, Mujib told an Associated Press correspondent in Dhaka that he was "willing to share power with Bhutto, each to serve as prime minister in his region, to keep Pakistan together," according to the U.S. Intelligence Bulletin, *Indo-Pakistani Crisis: Chronology of Events*.

Another account of Mujib's pledge to Pakistan's unity came from Iqbal F. Quadir, a retired vice admiral who was Pakistan's naval attache in Paris in 1971. A West European diplomat told Quadir that Mujib sent a message to Yahya on 11 March, saying he opposed Pakistan's partition and wanted to discuss possible solutions with the president.

Mujib passed the message through the unnamed diplomat, who was then consul general in Dhaka. He passed it on to Yahya in the manner Mujib had requested. Quadir learned about this in 1978 in Karachi, where the diplomat was then consul general. Quadir wrote in an article in February 2003 in the *Pakistan Defense Journal*.

Air Marshal Asghar Khan, former chief of Pakistan's air force, painted another picture. He asserted that Mujib had anticipated the crackdown, an assertion corroborated by another West Pakistani politician, Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, who was present in East Pakistan during the Mujib-Yahya talks. Bizenjo, an Awami League ally, was advised by Mujib on 24 March to leave Dhaka, after the Bengali leader had learned about the impending military action.

Asghar Khan's statements only reinforced the view that Mujib had expected his arrest to be only a passing phase as it had been previously and that he would be even more popular with the Bengalis once he got out of the prison. Victory would be ultimately his – and his people's – as the outcome of the election showed. Mujib might have been misled by Yahya's disinformation campaign, too. In the morning of 25 March, when the preparations for the crackdown were in progress, Radio Pakistan reported Yahya Khan had agreed "in principle" to hand over power to the elected representatives in East Pakistan and had conceded the Awami League's three other demands. Mujib was to meet again with Yahya in the afternoon, but that meeting was canceled.

The final account of Mujib's unwillingness to break Pakistan came from Prince Sadruddin Agha Khan, the U.N. high commissioner for the refugees. On 29 November 1971, he told a State Department official that Mujib might not want independent Bangladesh. "Even today, he wants a unified Pakistan," Sadruddin told Joseph Sisco, assistant secretary of state. Sadruddin's view was based on his long meetings with A.K. Brohi, Mujib's defense counsel in the sedition trial in 1971. Mujib, true to his pledge to the Bengalis, wanted their emancipation based on his six-point program, which envisaged East Pakistan's maximum autonomy in a confederal Pakistan, but not an independent Bangladesh.

The events in Dhaka during the fateful days of March 1971 surprised not only Mujib but also many Americans, including Kissinger, who were unclear why the talks had collapsed. The Americans thought Mujib and Yahya had reached a tentative deal, providing for an immediate establishment of provincial governments, temporary continuation of the central government under Yahya and the drafting of a constitution. The new constitution would outline the division of power between the central government and the provinces, with the central government keeping control of defense, foreign affairs and currency only.

A version of what caused the breakdown came from Council Muslim League President Muntaz Daultana. On 29 March, three days after the military started Operation Searchlight in Dhaka, Hobart Luppi, the U.S. consul general in Karachi, talked with Daultana at his residence. Daultana, who was in East Pakistan during Yahya's visit, spoke at length on the Mujib-Yahya talks.

He said Mujib's demands were pretty much as those Yahya had spelled out in his address to the nation on 26 March, except that Yahya did not detail Mujib's views on an interim central government. Mujib wanted Yahya to remain president with no political government at the central level. Mujib was not "particularly concerned" about the six points, and was willing to accept an interim arrangement based on the 1962 constitution. However, he envisaged that the president would allow the Awami League to exercise full control over East Pakistan affairs, while Yahya would coordinate inter-provincial affairs of the West wing.

On his "two-assembly" proposal, Mujib was rather vague whether he envisaged two separate assemblies or two subcommittees of the National Assembly. Daultana pressed Mujib to let the full assembly meet to sanction the interim arrangements, but Mujib refused, saying his supporters would not tolerate his sitting in the same room with Bhutto.

Daultana also tried to persuade Mujib to let the leaders of the small parties work on a solution to put him in power at the centre. Mujib said they

could try, but he doubted the West Pakistani establishment – as represented by Yahya and Bhutto – would ever permit the Bengalis to rule Pakistan.

Mujib was infuriated by the president's choice of advisers for the negotiations in Dhaka – Justice A.R. Cornelius, Yahya's law minister, General S.G.M.M. Pirzada, Yahya's chief of staff, and M.M. Ahmed, Yahya's economic adviser, whom Mujib considered a representative of the anti-Bengali West Pakistani establishment.

In a conversation with Mujib alone, Daultana had asked him if he genuinely wanted Pakistan to remain one. He told Mujib that some 40 MNAs-elect in West Pakistan were prepared to work with the Bengali leader toward a constitutional settlement that would permit the Awami League majority to take power at the center and to enjoy maximum provincial autonomy in the East wing. If, however, Mujib wanted separation, Daultana and his friends needed to know so that they could work to prevent a bloody rupture. Mujib replied that while he was under great pressure to declare an independent Bangladesh, he wanted to maintain Pakistan. Daultana accepted Mujib's response as sincere.

Daultana concluded from his conversations with Mujib that the Awami League leader was unshakably persuaded the West Pakistanis would never permit a Bengali to assume power through democratic means. He was convinced the recent moves by Yahya and Bhutto, such as the postponement of the National Assembly, were additional steps in a historical process of conspiracy against the Bengalis.

As a result of these suspicions, Mujib's goal in the negotiations with Yahya appeared to be the achievement of de jure control in East Pakistan under an interim arrangement. If he achieved this, Mujib believed he could then negotiate on an equal basis with West Pakistan over permanent constitutional arrangements. Daultana surmised Mujib would ultimately have sought a confederal arrangement.

Daultana's account indicated Yahya had reassessed his position after Mujib's election victory. There were two possible explanations of why Mujib agreed to keep Yahya as president. He probably wanted to entice Yahya to hand over power peacefully or Yahya himself had bargained for it.

Yahya, who remained mostly silent until his death in 1980, refused to accept the responsibility for the East Pakistan debacle and put the blame squarely on Bhutto. He made a 57-page affidavit before his death to set the record straight for the future generations. Yahya scrutinized each typed page in May 1978 at his house in Rawalpindi, made a few corrections and then signed the document, declaring it to be all true. It was released in 2005.

Yahya, however, never explained how Bhutto, who was not in power before the crackdown, could be blamed for the setback. Yahya's claim rather implied he was conceding he made a big mistake when he listened to Bhutto and decided not to hand over power to Mujib; it was perhaps a general's vain attempt to absolve himself of the responsibility of his own action.

He termed Mujib a patriot, but said that some leftists in the Awami League instigated him – a theory that got currency in West Pakistan, although it is hardly conceivable that given Mujib's towering personality, his resolve could have been shaken by a small group in his party. By calling Mujib a patriot in his journal, Yahya contradicted himself, too, because he told the Americans that he considered Mujib a traitor.

Contradicting Bhutto's claim that General Tikka Khan merely carried out the orders of the high command, Yahya denied he ever ordered Mujib's arrest. He said Tikka issued the order to capture Mujib dead or alive, a claim hard to accept at its face value, because the Pakistani army hierarchy was unlikely to permit a provincial governor or a regional commander to act on his own on such a major issue.

According to Yahya, Mujib was prepared to change his six-point demand, if necessary – an assertion supported by Muntaz Daultana. Yahya claimed that in the end he wanted to leave power in the hands of the Awami League, a decision he probably made after realizing that India would defeat Pakistan in the ensuing war. In fact, he did tell Farland through Sultan Khan, Pakistan's foreign secretary, that he had authorized Bhutto to introduce a U.N. resolution for a compromise with the Awami League within the framework of one Pakistan. Yahya confirmed it to the U.S. ambassador when Kissinger wanted to verify the resolution Bhutto had introduced in the Security Council two days before the surrender in Dhaka.

Bhutto gave an account of what happened in Dhaka in an interview with Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci. In mid-March 1971, Yahya told Bhutto about his upcoming trip to Dhaka and asked if he wanted to go, too. Bhutto replied if Mujib was willing talk to him, he would. After Yahya began talks with Mujib, he sent a telegram to tell Bhutto that Mujib would talk with him. Bhutto came to Dhaka on 19 March.

He met Mujib the next day together with Yahya. He got irritated when Mujib complained that so many people died in the hurricane in 1970 in East Pakistan, but no West Pakistani politician bothered to show up, an indirect jab at Bhutto.

When Bhutto asked how was he responsible for the hurricane, Mujib got up and said he had to go to a funeral. Bhutto got up, too, to escort him to the anteroom, although Mujib didn't want him to. In the anteroom, there were three people: Yahya's aide-de-camp, his military secretary, and his political aide, General Ghulam Umar. Mujib asked them to leave and then told Bhutto he should take West Pakistan and Mujib would take East. Bhutto said he didn't intend to dismember Pakistan. Bhutto learned about Mujib's arrest at 8 a.m. on 26 March. Although Bhutto did not acknowledge any advance knowledge of the military crackdown, he did endorse it.

Yet another account of the Mujib-Yahya talks came from Bizenjo, who was elected to the Pakistan National Assembly in 1970 on a National Awami Party ticket from West Pakistan.

As the situation deteriorated with each passing day in March 1971, Yahya Khan expressed his intention to meet with Sheikh Mujib to discuss matters, but Mujib was reluctant. Some of Bizenjo's friends and colleagues in Karachi, who had been watching the unfolding events with deep concern, asked him to go to Dhaka to try to persuade Mujib to meet with Yahya and have a frank and forthright talk on the situation.

East Pakistan was heading for the point beyond redemption. Mujib was not expressly opposed to negotiations, but the irony of the situation consisted in an amalgam of several crisscrossing factors. Punjab's traditional power elite had already decided to call it quits and get rid of the Bengalis rather than let them assume power by virtue of their majority in the National Assembly.

Bizenjo cited an example of the cynicism that marked the West Pakistani rulers' mindset. He went to see Yahya Khan in 1970 to discuss certain points relating to holding elections in Baluchistan based on the one-man-one-vote principle. During the conversation when the East Pakistan issue came up, the general said: "Sooner or later, East Pakistan will have to be amputated. And, if at all that is to happen, why let them suck our blood for two or three more years?"

Because of Yahya Khan's alarming remarks the previous year, Bizenjo was reluctant to visit Dhaka. He told his friends and colleagues that Mujib was the most popular national hero of Bengal. "If you can think of a way I can establish contact with him, then I may take the chance of going to Dhaka."

Muazzam Ali, who owned the Pakistan Press International news agency, was among those who wanted Bizenjo to go to Dhaka. He said he could send a message across to Dhaka using one of his telex machines that was still working. Bizenjo requested him to send a telex message to Mujib. The next day, Muazzam Ali brought Mujib's reply that he would be pleased if Bizenjo could come to Dhaka. When Bizenjo was at the Karachi airport to depart for Dhaka, his party chief Wali Khan arrived unexpectedly from London. Everybody pressed him to go to Dhaka with Bizenjo. Wali Khan instantly agreed.

Bizenjo and Wali Khan came to Dhaka on 13 March. From the airport they went straight to the residence of Ahmadul and Laila Kabir, their political colleagues and owners of the Daily Sangbad newspaper.

When they met with Mujib the next day, Bizenjo straightaway asked Mujib whether he wanted to make a unilateral declaration of independence. Mujib became very emotional. He asked: "Who is telling whom not to break up Pakistan? You, who were associated with the Congress, telling me, who was a hardcore Muslim Leaguer and rendered sacrifices for the creation of Pakistan? What an irony!"

They urged Mujib to meet with Yahya Khan and find a way out to ensure the transfer of power to him. Mujib replied Yahya and his colleagues would not give him power, even if that meant Pakistan's break-up. He finally agreed to meet Yahya and asked them to stay in Dhaka as long as the talks lasted.

Yahya Khan arrived in Dhaka on 15 March. He invited Wali Khan and Bizenjo to meet him at the Government House. They told Yahya that Mujib opposed secession, but demanded power be transferred to him. Yahya asked Bizenjo and Wali Khan to remain in Dhaka while the talks continued.

Mujib kept them abreast of the proceedings every day. Initially, the talks went on rather smoothly. Then Yahya Khan invited all the West Pakistani political leaders to Dhaka and summoned his economic adviser M.M. Ahmed. Upon arrival in Dhaka, Bhutto asked the West Pakistanis to forge a common position. Wali Khan and Bizenjo rejected his suggestion.

Talks with Yahya proceeded then on a new trajectory. Initially, he said he could transfer power if the conditions of Legal Framework Order were met. Mujib suggested that two assemblies – one consisting of members elected from West Pakistan and the other from East Pakistan – be convened to prepare their separate draft constitutions, followed by a joint session of the two to draft a federal constitution. Yahya insisted on convening one assembly. Bizenjo proposed five assemblies or constitutional committees, one for each province to prepare five draft constitutions.

Yahya showed a slight inclination toward that suggestion. However, when Wali Khan and Bizenjo met Mujib separately that night, he told them the general's mood was shifting fast and becoming unpredictable. Mujib said he would no longer ask for convening of one assembly or two assemblies. He would demand immediate transfer of power and lifting of martial law. The core issue was the lifting of martial law and transfer of power to his party.

They conveyed to Yahya Khan Mujib's demand to lift martial law and hand over power to him. When they cautioned Yahya against inviting Pakistan's disintegration by sticking to technicalities, the general replied if Mujib did not behave his army knew how to shoot their way through.

When the two met Mujib on 24 March, he broke the alarming news, saying the army would move in the next two days. He advised them to leave Dhaka. Stunned and speechless, they left Mujib's house.

The Americans remained convinced till the end that Mujib did not want to break Pakistan. He would have possibly opted for a confederation if given an option even in November. Sisco also believed India would have accepted a peaceful solution if Mujib were given power. India did not want war. The Americans blamed Bhutto for the collapse of the Dhaka talks.

The Nixon administration's initial policy after the crackdown was based on its concern about the stability of the region, which was geopolitically significant in terms of the Soviet Union and China. India was of potentially greater significance than Pakistan. Therefore, in formulating U.S. policy, the relative preeminence of American interests in India was an underlying factor in the decisions that Washington made. As a result, on an operational level, America wanted to keep close relationship with India and reasonable relations with West Pakistan, while avoiding steps that could irreparably damage a yet-undefined future relationship with East Pakistan. Three major ingredients behind the strategy that America followed since the civil war started were: restraint, international aid and political accommodation.

Washington advised both Islamabad and New Delhi to exercise restraint to avoid an all-out war. On the Indian side, this reinforced restraint, although contingency planning for war continued. America's counsels were somewhat less successful in Pakistan.

America put considerable effort into lessening India's refugee burden. Washington considered it to be the most likely cause for war. To this end, America offered grants and loans to India and actively promoted the U.N. relief effort. On the Pakistani side, Washington promoted an international relief effort to help the refugees return home. Islamabad initially responded slowly, but later embraced it.

The Nixon administration urged Yahya to move as fast as possible with political accommodation in East Pakistan. Recognizing the complex and sensitive issues involved and the fact that Yahya might have had only limited political flexibility, Washington refrained from attempting to spell out the details beyond the need to deal with political leaders. However, these efforts bore no meaningful results.

The United States, which initially decided to maintain a hands-off posture in the East Pakistan conflict, got a wake-up call when Archer Blood, the U.S. consul general in Dhaka, sent a telegram to Washington on 29 March 1971, on the Bengali massacre. He questioned the wisdom of America's do-nothing policy ignoring the dire situation on the ground.

The consulate general reported that the army was setting houses on fire and shooting people as they emerged from the burning houses. On 30 March, the mission reported that the army had killed many apparently unarmed students at Dhaka University.

The U.S. Embassy in Islamabad concurred in expressing the consulate's sense of horror and indignation at the "brutal, ruthless and excessive use of force by the Pak military," but opposed any action by Washington, describing the military action as a "constituted" government using force against citizens accused of flouting its authority.

Blood castigated Farland's contention. He questioned how the martial law administration could describe the freely elected representatives of 73 percent of the voters of East Pakistan as "miscreants." Ironically, the consul general noted, most of the countryside of East Pakistan apparently were in the hands of these miscreants.

Blood's cables infuriated the White House. Nixon recalled Blood from Dhaka and banished him to the State Department's personnel office. Blood, who died in 2004 at the age of 81 in Colorado, was honored by his colleagues in 1971 with the Christian A. Herter Award for his "initiative, integrity, intellectual courage and creative dissent." The Archer K. Blood American Center Library at the U.S. Embassy in Dhaka

honors his memory in an independent Bangladesh that he prophesied and supported.

Why did America continue to support Pakistan despite having full knowledge of these atrocities?

Peter Constable, country director of Pakistan at the State Department, told the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in 1973 that when the East Pakistan tragedy began, America developed a policy that had three objectives: to provide humanitarian aid, to encourage a political settlement and to prevent war.

Many in the Nixon administration, including Kissinger, blamed the president's China policy for the disastrous posture. America's disdain for India, however, could be traced to the pre-partition time as far back as 1942 – when a U.S. technical mission invited by the Indian government to investigate India's industrial resources to recommended production of war materials – came under harsh criticism in the Indian press. America often faced accusation, even during British rule, that it interfered in Indian politics. President Roosevelt's personal envoy Colonel Louis Johnson faced such a charge during the Cripps Mission. Ironically, the Americans consistently had always sought to avoid such accusations. It was America's traditional strategy not to be charged with interference, plus Nixon's personal anti-Indian mindset, that guided the administration not to press Yahya despite pleas by American diplomats to do so.

India's involvement in the Bangladesh war was perhaps more fortuitous than preplanned. New Delhi's war policy evolved gradually, shaped by events at home and abroad. Until 25 March, the Indians believed their interests were better served by a united Pakistan in which the Bengalis would be the dominant force. When the Pakistani military cracked down in East Pakistan, India's estimate of its own best interests shifted in favor of an independent Bangladesh under a moderate leadership.

India opted to take advantage of the opportunity after it had solidified its position militarily with its treaty with the Soviet Union. Its spectacularly successful campaign to generate a groundswell of support worldwide for the Bengalis' plight made its task easier. Initially, India showed reluctance to create Bangladesh by force, despite widespread support for it in parliament. Gandhi's decision to support the guerrillas was based on her calculation that if New Delhi did not support them, the insurgents would turn to China to India's peril. She chose to march on the warpath based on her conviction that negotiations would not work even if Mujib and Yahya hammered out a deal, because she believed the insurgents were no longer loyal to the Bengali leader.

Gandhi also suspected Yahya was not really interested in negotiations that would install Mujib in power. Yahya's moves, she concluded, were just a smokescreen. Her views were solidified by Yahya's attempt to hold a farcical election to fill the parliament seats that he had declared vacant. The formation of a civilian government with discredited right-wing Bengali politician Nurul Amin at its head and Bhutto as his deputy served another blow to Yahya's credibility. India had a lingering suspicion of Bhutto, whom the Indians considered the 1965 war architect. New Delhi was also concerned China could directly intervene in Pakistan's favor.

Ultimately, India saw the crisis as an opportunity to weaken its main enemy. Pakistan had humiliated India in 1965. New Delhi was determined this time around not to face a defeat. India figured a weak Pakistan would greatly simplify its defense problem. New Delhi, therefore, covertly supported the Bangladesh movement, while putting its military on war footing, should the need be. Indian public opinion also sang out the same hymn on Gandhi's policy. The Indians felt the effects of the crushing refugee burden, especially in West Bengal. Above all, most Indians saw Pakistan as a threat that could lead to war again. Why not eliminate that danger when the opportunity knocked on the door?

Despite Yahya's use of brutal force in East Pakistan, many Bengalis still wanted a peaceful solution. Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, foreign minister of Bangladesh government-in-exile in India, was among them. An admittedly pro-Western and right-wing politician, Moshtaque unequivocally favored strong ties with the United States. He opposed communists, as did a majority of the top Awami League leaders. He had been widely held as the man who hatched a conspiracy in Kolkata to seek a compromise with Yahya, excluding Sheikh Mujib, a story that gained wide circulation in Bangladesh soon after the war.

In fact, the contacts with the Americans were initiated by Kazi Zahirul Qaiyum, an Awami League parliament member from Comilla, who claimed he represented Moshtaque. On 31 July, Qaiyum told a political officer at the consulate general in Kolkata that the Awami League leaders feared extremist elements would take over the Bangladesh movement if the guerrilla war lasted too long. So, they were interested in a political settlement and were prepared to back away from their demand for total independence. Qaiyum proposed a meeting of the Awami League, Pakistan, America and India to strike a deal with Yahya. He stipulated Mujib's participation in the negotiations was an essential prerequisite.

According to Qaiyum's statements, it was not just Moshtaque, but the entire Awami League leadership – including Syed Nazrul Islam – that wanted a political deal with Yahya Khan. Qaiyum told the political officer the Awami League leadership was unanimous in their desire for a compromise settlement with Pakistan.

Despite making an overture to both British and American diplomats in Kolkata at the initial phase, Tajuddin Ahmad, prime minister of the provisional government, later distanced himself from a U.S.-blessed deal. By then both the Soviet Union and India, which were initially opposed to breaking up Pakistan, had come out in favor of the Bengali cause. Because of the initial reluctance of Moscow and Delhi to support Bangladesh, the Bengali leadership had only London and Washington to turn to after forming the Mujibnagar government. The letter that Syed Nazrul and Moshtaque jointly wrote to Nixon seeking U.S. recognition of Bangladesh on 24 April was mailed from West Berlin, Germany, on 26 May – not from India.

According to Qaiyum, the cabinet decided that any agreement reached between Mujib and Yahya would be acceptable to it, provided it was arranged through the "proper channels." By the proper channels, Qaiyum meant the U.S. government's participation in arrangements leading to a pact. The cabinet opposed any deal negotiated via the Soviets, such as the Tashkent Declaration.

The government-in-exile wanted Moshtaque to visit the United States, along with three or four other Bangladesh leaders to discuss ways with U.S. officials to solve their problems. Qaiyum personally favored total independence. But he and most other Bangladesh leaders were willing to accept some sort of a confederation. He said the cabinet members "believe that Mujib's life is more valuable than independence."

When the State Department sought input from the embassy in Pakistan on granting Moshtaque a visa to visit Washington, Farland opposed the idea, saying such a step would inevitably raise concerns in Pakistan about America's good faith in not encouraging the separatist movement. The State Department had sought the U.S. Embassy's idea on the suggestion put forward by Qaiyum that Moshtaque be granted a visa to visit Washington to meet with the U.S. officials there.

Moshtaque met with the political officer in Kolkata on 28 September for 90 minutes. He had been looking for a way to contact the United States, but was unsure how. When TIME correspondent Dan Coggin interviewed him on 26 September, he asked him how to get in touch with

Washington. Coggin suggested he contact the U.S. consul general or a political officer in Kolkata. Following Coggin's advice, Moshtaque asked Bangladesh High Commissioner M. Hossain Ali to arrange a meeting. Ali called the political counselor to ask if he wished to talk with the foreign minister. The officer replied he did, if the foreign minister wished to talk to him. Ali said Moshtaque did, and scheduled an evening appointment. Ali, who had known the political officer through the diplomatic circle, met him at the High Commission. Moshtaque arrived five minutes later. Ali introduced the officer to Moshtaque, and then left the two alone for an hour's private talk. He rejoined them for the last thirty minutes.

Moshtaque opened the conversation by asking the American for a precise outline of the U.S. policy vis-a-vis Bangladesh. Moshtaque bluntly asked: "Why are you killing us?" He blamed America for the East Pakistan events since 25 March because of Washington's continued support for Yahya Khan. He, nonetheless, said Bangladesh wanted close ties with the United States and hoped Washington would find it was in its own interest to help arrange peaceful independence for Bangladesh.

Moshtaque warned the time was running out for America to step in and help avoid a leftist takeover of Bangladesh. He had no desire to talk directly to Yahya. He requested the U.S. government to speak to Yahya for the Bangladesh government. He asked for an official response to his requests as soon as possible and expressed a desire to discreetly maintain a direct channel with the political officer. He said he assumed there would be no other channel. He said he had not authorized any other channel himself, although he knew other well-intentioned Bangladesh leaders had and might in the future contact U.S. officials in an effort to find out the "mind of the Americans."

Moshtaque asked the United States to make a fresh effort to push Pakistan to release Mujib. He then presented the officer with a list of Bangladesh desires. He did not wish to be held accountable for his precise wording because he was inexperienced in diplomacy and must obtain the cabinet approval for the exact wording later. His list included three principal demands: (a) full independence for Bangladesh; (b) release of Sheikh Mujib; and (c) after independence, massive long-term economic assistance from America to help reconstruct the nation.

Responding to Moshtaque's demands, Washington told the consulate general to tell the Bangladesh leaders that the U.S. diplomats had "already discussed the possibility of such a meeting with President Yahya and he had indicated his interest. The U.S. government is willing to assist in passing messages back and forth that might lead to a meeting, but we are not interested in playing the transmission belt for 'demands' or 'positions' of one side or the other."

Despite their reluctance to get involved directly, the Americans wanted to keep their "options open for contacts with other elements of the Bangladesh leadership, although this will continue to be controlled from Washington. Hence, while we assume that Moshtaque may remain the principal channel for future communications, we do not wish to give him the impression that he will necessarily be the only channel. For example, we obviously might be in touch with the Bangladesh delegation in New York, which presumably was sent to this country for the purpose of contacting foreign officials, including the United States. Therefore, you may inform Moshtaque at your discretion that we intend to maintain some contact with the other Bangladesh representatives, if an occasion arises."

By early October, New Delhi had become fully aware of U.S.-Bangla secret contacts. On 2 October, India's external affairs minister visited New York to attend the U.N. General Assembly. When Sisco met with Sardar Swaran Singh, he urged the Indian leader to influence the Bangladesh officials to start talks with Yahya. Singh replied India lacked influence with Bangladesh. He, however, added this did not mean India opposed the dialogue.

When Sisco suggested that India initiate talks without insisting upon Mujib's participation to see what could be accomplished, Singh said the United States had contacts with the Bengalis and should try to bring about the dialogue on its own. Sisco said Washington would do what it could with Pakistan to get talks started.

On 21 November, Qaiyum again met with the political officer after a month-long hiatus. He pleaded that the U.S. government press Yahya to release Mujib, saying unless he was freed communists would take over the Bangladesh leadership. He said that even if Mujib were kept confined in West Pakistan after his release, the situation would cool down, helping a negotiated solution. Only Mujib had the power to give Yahya a face-saving exit. He suggested that Yahya hand over power to another general, as Ayub did, and go abroad. Yahya "has no right to destroy both parts of Pakistan." Qaiyum warned that time was running out. The Mukti Bahini was increasingly successful with India's help, and the Bangladesh leaders expected a military victory in East Pakistan within the next two months.

On 27 November, Qaiyum told the officer that the Bangladesh cabinet had gone to Delhi at Gandhi's request. He had recommended to Delhi that the cabinet members not "sign any thing" in New Delhi unless they first brought it back to Kolkata for general Awami League discussion.

Qaiyum reported that D. P. Dhar, Gandhi's foreign policy aide, in his latest visit to Kolkata had questioned Moshtaque about his talks with the United States and called the foreign minister a "traitor." Moshtaque denied everything, but Dhar said he knew all about the negotiations because the State Department had told everything to the Indian Embassy in Washington. Qaiyum said he told the Indians the Bangladesh government had not sold its soul to India and that as an independent government, it could talk with any other government it wished, the political officer reported.

He claimed he heard about the Dhar-Moshtaque exchange and pro tested about it to Syed Nazrul Islam. He said that he – rather than Moshtaque – had been the one who talked with the U.S. government representatives. If India did not like what he had done, it was just too bad. He said he and his group in the Awami League did not intend to be dictated to by India. He had threatened to walk out on the Bangladesh government along with some 43 supporters and go to Pakistan rather than "sell out" to India.

America's failure to bring about a negotiated settlement was later raised by Moshtaque during a conversation with the U.S. ambassador after becoming president following Mujib's overthrow. Making an appeal for America's support for his new government, Moshtaque told Ambassador Davis Boster on 20 August 1975, that Washington "must not lose the opportunity today which we had lost in 1971," according to a telegram the U.S. Embassy in Dhaka sent to the State Department.

The Awami League's concern over a possible leftist takeover of the guerrilla movement, its urge to be free from India's dictation and its resolve to save Mujib as well as its fear of massive destruction and loss of lives from a war motivated the Bengalis to seek negotiations with Yahya. They feared an all-out war would reduce East Pakistan to rubble, plunging them into an almost insurmountable task of rebuilding the free country from ashes. They were frightened out of their minds by other thoughts as well, such as the effect of a prolonged guerrilla war as witnessed in Vietnam or India annexing part of East Pakistan to resettle the refugees in the border region. They also worried that if India succeeded in slicing East Pakistan and West Pakistan held a big chunk of Kashmir, they might be caught in diplomatic wranglings between Islamabad and New Delhi in which their interests would receive a diminished priority. In the end, America's dilly-dallying in arranging a meeting as well as Yahya's reluctance to talk with the Bengali leaders in Kolkata and Mujib, along with India's ultimate resistance to any direct talks, thwarted the idea that Washington did not

originate but pursued zealously. This fiasco paved the way for India to opt for a military solution.

As the Indian military marched into East Pakistan full throttle, and international efforts to stop the fighting gained momentum at the United Nations, Gandhi found herself between a rock and hard place. If she advanced her campaign to completely crush the Pakistani military in the West as she had promised to her cabinet months ago, she would face a potential fight with Washington and Beijing. She would also antagonize Moscow, which wanted to end the war after capturing Dhaka. If she backed off, her colleagues would give her a hard time and India would lose a rare opportunity to cripple an archenemy forever.

She explained to her cabinet that if India accepted the U.N. ceasefire proposal after Bangladesh's liberation, it could avoid further complications and "might also rule out the current possibility of a Chinese intervention in Ladakh."

India's Defense Minister Jagjivan Ram and several other military leaders opposed a ceasefire until India had taken certain unspecified areas of Kashmir and destroyed "the war mechanism of Pakistan."

Gandhi overruled the opponents, saying that "for the moment India would not categorically reject" the U.N. ceasefire proposal. India would accept a ceasefire after the Awami League regime was installed in Dhaka.

Many Indian parliament members, both from her own party as well as the opposition, were unhappy with Gandhi's decision, apparently unaware of the international pressure she faced to quickly end the war. They wanted India to capture at least Azad Kashmir and Lahore.

Jagjivan Ram, when criticized for the ceasefire, told parliament the prime minister was "responsible for that". He, however, refused to go publicly against her decision. When the members pressed him on capturing Azad Kashmir, he simply responded: "Enough is enough."

Gandhi's decision to abruptly halt the campaign short of her desired goal was not a pleasant one to herself, either. "Madame Gandhi said she couldn't forgive her father for leaving Baluchistan out of India, because it was in India's 'historic sphere,'" Kissinger recalled during a conversation in Washington with the Shah of Iran in 1975. If she could not undo her father's historic mistake, she could at least blunt its effect by turning Baluchistan into a neutral country, one that would not pose a security threat to India as a united West Pakistan would.

Gandhi's action resulted from strong pressure put on her by Moscow, which incorrectly perceived Nixon meant business when he dispatched the naval fleet into the Bay of Bengal. In fact, the United States later took credit for saving West Pakistan from disintegration by sending the Enterprise, which the Americans believed scared both the Soviet Union and India. The Soviet Union, which came under U.S. pressure to end the war, told India that it would accept the ceasefire as soon as Bangladesh was liberated. Moscow was "concerned about the possibility of a Chinese intervention."

For Pakistan, the end game neared on 14 December, when U.S. consul general in Dhaka, Herbert A. Spivack, received a call from General A.A.K. Niazi, Pakistan's Eastern sector commander, to "receive him urgently." He appeared at the consulate a short time later, along with General Rao Farman Ali, the military adviser to the governor of East Pakistan. He told Spivack the bombing of Dhaka in the afternoon "had convinced him that the fighting must be stopped immediately to prevent further bloodshed, even though, he said, his troops were still in good positions and were not in the danger at the moment". Farman Ali had in his possession a rough draft proposal he wished the consul general to transmit to New Delhi so that it could be passed on through Indian channels to the Indian field commander in East Pakistan.

Niazi asked that the U.S. envoy indicate in his transmittal message that the general was prepared to name a representative immediately to discuss the details of his offer with an Indian counterpart. He hoped the Indian commander would do the same promptly, so that negotiations could begin at once. Niazi and Farman still wished to avoid using the word "surrender". Niazi stated he had the full authority to take the stated action. When Spivack questioned him specifically whether Niazi needed any concurrence by Yahya or anyone else in Islamabad, his reply was definitely "no."

Spivack had earlier received a call from East Pakistan Governor A.M. Malik that he and Farman Ali wanted to submit certain ceasefire proposals. Malik felt a ceasefire was absolutely necessary because the situation had hopelessly worsened. He assured the consul general the proposals would carry their signatures and would have Yahya's approval. Shortly afterward, Malik called Spivack again to say he would not submit the proposals because Niazi had stated talks were taking place between the central government and the U.S. ambassador in Islamabad.

Subsequently, when the State Department received Niazi's proposal, it immediately asked Farland to see Yahya to ascertain what he wanted the United States to do. Farland replied Yahya had indicated, through Sultan Khan, that Niazi had the full authority to act along the lines reported in the telegram from Dhaka.

Yahya authorized passing the proposal to New Delhi and to Bhutto in New York, but the State Department was leery to put itself between Indian and Pakistani military authorities. So, it directed the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi not to deliver Niazi's proposal to the Indian government. Rather, the U.S. Mission at the United Nations was advised to give the message to Bhutto with the suggestion that he pass it on to the Indian foreign minister in New York or pass it through the U.N. secretary general. Bhutto chose not to give the message to the Indians. After confirming that Yahya wanted the message delivered, the State Department told the U.S. Mission in New York to deliver the message to the Indian delegation.

In New Delhi, U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Keating gave Niazi's proposal to Haksar on 15 December, with a copy to General Sam Manekshaw, the Indian army chief. In his reply, Manekshaw reiterated his guarantees previously given to Rao Farman Ali, promising to ensure "safety of all your military and paramilitary forces who surrender to me in Bangladesh".

Along with the guarantees came Manekshaw's warning: "I assure you I have no desire to inflict unnecessary casualties on your troops as I abhor loss of human lives. Should, however, you do not comply with what I have stated, you will leave me with no other alternative but to resume my offensive with the utmost vigor at 0900 hours Indian standard time on 16 December".

On 16 December at 2:30 p.m., Gandhi, who had been compared with the Hindu goddess Durga by many Indians, told Lok Sabha that the Pakistani forces commanded by Niazi had surrendered unconditionally an hour earlier in Dhaka. She hailed Dhaka as "the free capital of a free country".

Niazi, who surrendered to Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora, commander of the Eastern sector of the Indian army, remained defiant until his death. He refused to accept the blame for the surrender, rebuffing the Pakistan war commission's suggestion that he should have embraced a hero's death fighting to the end. He blamed Yahya for the setback.

Niazi claimed he surrendered at the general headquarters' instruction. Yahya and the other generals told him to surrender because they were

worried India would destroy the entire Pakistani army and break up West Pakistan into pieces, if Islamabad continued fighting. Niazi's claim stands to logic. New Delhi, in fact, had planned to crush Pakistan's army to a point that it ceased to be a military force capable of waging another war against India ever again. India backed off under Soviet pressure.

Until the end, Yahya hoped outside forces, namely China and the United States, would come to his rescue. Based on false hopes from Washington and Beijing, he sought to keep the Eastern Command's morale high. But no one came to save Pakistan at the end.

# People

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Ahmad, M.M., Deputy Chairman of the Economic Planning Commission in Pakistan, Economic Adviser to President Yahya Khan

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Ahmed, Muzaffar, President, National Awami Party, Bangladesh

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DePalma, Samuel, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs

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Dhar, Manoranjan, Leader, Pakistan National Congress, later Law Minister, Bangladesh

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Gandhi, Indira, Prime Minister of India  
Gauhar, Altaf, Secretary, Ministry of Information, Pakistan  
Giri, Varahagiri Venkata, Vice President of India until 3 May 1969; Acting President, May 3-July 29, 1969; President from 20 August 1969  
Gordon, Herbert, Consul General in Calcutta  
Green, Marshall, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs from May 1969; also Chairman, Special Group on Southeast Asia from May 1970  
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Haldeman, H.R., White House Chief of Staff  
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Helms, Richard M., Director of Central Intelligence until February 1973  
Paul Marc Henry, U.N. Special Assistant, East Pakistan, 1971  
Hilaly, Agha, Pakistani Ambassador to the United States until September 1971  
Hildreth, Horace A., U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, 1953  
Hoskinson, Samuel M., member of the National Security Council staff, 1970-1972  
Hossain, Kamal, Law and Foreign Minister, Bangladesh, 1972-1975  
Hughes, Thomas L., Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the State Department  
Huang Hua, Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations  
Hughes, Thomas L., Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, until August 1969  
Hull, Cordell, Secretary of State, 1933-1944  
Hunt, John, U.S. Army Major, Analyst, Defense Intelligence Agency  
Irwin, John N., II, Under Secretary of State, September 1970-July 1972; thereafter, Deputy Secretary of State  
Islam, Syed Nazrul, Acting President of the Provisional Government of Bangladesh, April-December 1971  
Jacob, JFR, Major General, Chief of Staff, Indian Army Eastern Command  
Jinnah, M. A., Governor General, Pakistan, 1947-1948  
Jha, Lakshmi Kant, Governor of the Reserve Bank of India until May 1970; thereafter, Indian Ambassador to the United States  
Johnson, Louis, Colonel, Personal Envoy to India, President Roosevelt  
Johnson, U. Alexis, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs from February 1969  
Jonganeel, Dirk, manager, Philips Electric Company Ltd, Karachi, Pakistan, 1971  
Kamaruzzaman, A.H.M., Home Minister, Provisional Government of Bangladesh, 1971  
Karim, S. A., Foreign Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh until August 1972  
Khan Akbar, Major General, Chief, ISI, Pakistan military intelligence unit  
Khan, Abdul Hamid, General, Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Army and Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrator  
Khan, Asghar, Air Marshal, Chief of Air Force, Pakistan, 1957-1965  
Khan, Ayub Mohammad, President of Pakistan until March 1969  
Khan, Gul Hassan, Lieutenant General, chief of general staff, Pakistan Army  
Khan, Abdul Rahim, Air Chief Marshal, Commander in Chief, Pakistan Air Force, 1969-1972  
Khan, Tikka, Lieutenant General, Martial Law Administrator and Governor of East Pakistan, February-September 1971; Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army from March 1972  
Khan, Wali, President, Pakistan National Awami Party  
Khan, Yakub, Lieutenant General, Commander, Pakistan Army, Eastern Command  
Khan, Z.A., Lieutenant Colonel, Pakistan Army, Comilla Cantonment, 1971  
Khar, Ghulam Mustafa, Chief Minister, Punjab and Pakistan People's Party leader  
Kaul, Triloki Nath, Foreign Secretary of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs from February 1969-1972  
Keating, Kenneth B., Ambassador to India, May 1969-July 1972  
Kellogg, Francis L., Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Refugee and Migration Affairs from January 1971; also Chairman of the Interagency Committee on Pakistani Refugee Relief  
Kennedy, Richard T., member of the National Security Council staff, January 1970-January 1972  
Kennedy, Ted, U.S. Senator, 1962-2009  
Kissinger, Henry A., Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

Kosygin, Aleksei N., Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union  
Kuznetsov, V.V., First Deputy Foreign Minister, Soviet Union.  
Lall, K.B., Secretary, Ministry of Defense, India  
Laingen, L. Bruce, Deputy Chief of Mission in Afghanistan until July 1971; thereafter Country Director for Pakistan and Afghanistan, Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Department of State  
Laird, Melvin R., Secretary of Defense, January 1969-January 1973  
Luppi, Hobart, Consul General in Karachi, Pakistan  
Malik, A.M., Special Assistant to President Yahya for Displaced Persons and Relief and Rehabilitation Operations in East Pakistan, July-September 1971; thereafter Governor of East Pakistan  
Matskevich, Vladimir, Agriculture Minister, Soviet Union  
Manekshaw, Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji, General, Chief of Staff of the Indian Army  
McConaughy, Walter P., U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, 1962-1964  
Menon, V.K. Krishna, Defense Minister, India, 1957-1962  
Mitchell, John, Attorney General, January 1969-February 1972  
Mirza, Iskander, Major General, President, Pakistan, 1958  
Moorer, Admiral Thomas H., USN, Chief of Naval Operations until July 1970; thereafter Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
Murray Wallace, State Department Adviser to President Roosevelt, 1942  
Musharraf, Khalid, Lieutenant Colonel, commander Mukti Bahini, Eastern Sector, Bangladesh  
Naas, Charles, Political Counselor at the Embassy in Afghanistan  
Nagra, G.S., Major General, Indian Army Eastern Command, GOC, 101 Communication Zone  
Nehru, B.K., Ambassador of India to Washington, 1958-1961  
Nehru, Jawaharlal, Prime Minister, India, 1947-1964  
Newberry, Daniel O., Deputy Chief of Mission in Afghanistan from October 1972  
Niazi, AAK, Lieutenant General, Commander, Eastern Sector, Pakistan Army  
Nixon, Richard M., President of the United States  
Noyes, James H., Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs  
Nutter, G. Warren, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs  
Olds, Glenn, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Economic and Social Council (1969-1971) and President Nixon's Special Assistant for Policy and Manpower Development  
Osmany, MAG, General, Commander in Chief, Bangladesh Army, 1971-1972  
Packard, David, Deputy Secretary of Defense from January 1969  
Pickard, Sir Cyril, British High Commissioner in Pakistan  
Pirzada, G.M.M., Lieutenant Gen, Shief of Staff, President Yahya Khan Qaiyum, Qazi Zahirul, Member of the Pakistan National Assembly, Awami League Representative  
Podgorny, Nikolai, President, Soviet Union, 1965-1977  
Quadir, Iqbal F., retired Vice Admiral, Pakistan Navy  
Rahman, Sheikh Mujibur, (Mujib) President of the Awami League; Prime Minister and Minister of Defense of Bangladesh from January 1972  
Ram, Jagjivan, Indian Minister of Defense from June 1970  
Rasgotra, Maharaja Krishna, Minister for Political Affairs of the Indian Embassy in the United States  
Raza, Nawabzada Agha Mohammad, Major General, Pakistani Ambassador to the United States, November 1971-April 1972  
Rogers, William P., Secretary of State, January 1969-September 1973  
Rusk, Dean, Secretary of State, 1961-1969  
Samad, Abdus, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, December 1971-1973  
Saunders, Harold H., member of the National Security Council staff  
Schneider, David T., Country Director for India, Ceylon, Nepal, and the Maldive Islands, Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Department of State, from August 1969  
Selden, Armistead, I., Jr., Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs  
Singh, Dinesh, Minister of External Affairs of India, February 1969-June 1970  
Singh, Moni, president, Communist Party of Bangladesh  
Singh, Sardar Swaran, Indian Minister of Defense until June 1970; thereafter, Minister of External Affairs  
Sisco, Joseph J., Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs until February 1969; thereafter, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs; also Chairman of the NSC Interdepartmental Group for the Near East and South Asia  
Sober, Sidney, Director of the Office of Regional Affairs, Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Department of State until November 1969, thereafter Deputy Chief of Mission in Pakistan  
Sonnenfeldt, Helmut, member of the National Security Council staff, 1969-1972  
Spengler, William F., Country Director for Pakistan and Afghanistan, Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Department of State, July 1970-July 1971  
Spivack, Herbert D., Consul General in Dhaka, June 1971-September 1972  
Stone, Galen L., Chargé d'Affaires in India from August 1969

Sultan Khan, Mohammad, Foreign Secretary of the Foreign Ministry of Pakistan until April 1972, thereafter Ambassador to the United States

Thant, U, Secretary-General of the United Nations until December 1971

Umar, Ghulam, Major General, Political Adviser, President Yahya Khan, Pakistan

Van Hollen, Christopher, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, May 1969-September 1972; thereafter, Ambassador to Sri Lanka

Vorontsov, Yuli M., Minister of the Soviet Embassy in the United States Williams, Maurice J., Deputy Administrator, Agency for International Development; Chairman of Interdepartmental Working Group on East Pakistan Disaster Relief Yahya Khan, Agha Mohammad, General, Chief Martial Law Administrator, President, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, March 1969-December 1971

Zahir, Mohammad, King of Afghanistan

Zumwalt, Elmo R., Admiral, Chief of Naval Operations

## How America Viewed East Pakistan in 1971: Genesis of U.S. Policy

On 1 March 1971, Harold Saunders and Samuel Hoskinson, both members of the U.S. National Security Council staff, prepared a memorandum for Henry Kissinger, then President Richard Nixon's national security adviser, to brief him about what was going on in Pakistan.

"Events in Pakistan today took a major step toward a possible early move by East Pakistan for independence," they wrote, adding that the future course of events now depended largely on the decision of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the other Awami League leaders, who had won an absolute majority in the just concluded parliamentary elections.

It was the day Pakistan's President General Yahya Khan postponed the scheduled parliament session. The legislature was to frame a constitution to pave the way for the nation to welcome a new civilian government after suffering from a decade-long military rule. Mujib was to become prime minister, materialising an aspiration long cherished by the Bengalis, who formed Pakistan's majority. But Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, whose party captured the majority seats in West Pakistan, would not concede.

"It is impossible to predict what Mujibur Rahman and the Awami League will do at this point. They are most unlikely, however, to back down from their six-point program calling for virtual autonomy. It has the strong emotional and popular backing in East Pakistan and is adamantly opposed by West Pakistani leader Z.A. Bhutto, important elements of the military, and many politically aware West Pakistanis."

Yahya's decision to postpone the parliamentary session was in direct response to Bhutto's demand. Pressure from senior military officers, who opposed Yahya's conciliatory overtures to the Bengalis to reach a political solution acceptable to Pakistan's both wings, also influenced the president.

It was perhaps an attempt by Yahya to buy Mujib and Bhutto some time to strike a deal, but the violent reaction in East Pakistan – and Mujib's subsequent call for a general strike – might have made reconciliation impossible and played into the hands of Yahya's critics in the military, according to an analysis made shortly after, on 2 March 1971, by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

"The president now appears to have a fresh mandate to martial law administrators and in doing so ousted the conciliatory governor of East Pakistan," the report said, pointing to a potentially ominous development with the 1 March departure of Gov. Admiral S.M. Ahsan, who opposed the proposal to use repressive measures against the Bengalis. "Since the military hardliners now appear to have gained ascendancy with Yahya, a resort to repressive efforts to thwart East Pakistani aspirations is a real possibility."

However, predicted David E. Mark, deputy director of regional research at the State Department, the use of force would not deter the Bengalis. Rather, it would only strengthen their resolve against West Pakistan, making it even more difficult for a successor moderate government to rule Pakistan.

"The apparent shift away from attempts at conciliation suggests that Yahya's hopes for relatively crisis-free transition to civilian rule have been dashed. Unless the East Pakistanis can be brought to believe that the West wing intends to treat them equitably – a prospect which has become increasingly unlikely – secession appears inevitable."

Yahya's postponement of parliament did not surprise the Americans, including the U.S. ambassador. Ambassador Joseph Farland had met Yahya on 25 February, when he gave him Nixon's signed photograph, which the general hugely appreciated. Soon after exchanging pleasantries, they turned to the matter of Pakistan's gathering political crisis.

"For the first time in my experience with him," Farland later reported to Washington, "Yahya was clearly worried about the next steps on the difficult road towards a representative government."

The impasse between Mujib and Bhutto about the constitution disheartened Yahya. He held Bhutto in low esteem. He was upset with Mujib's attitude. On Mujib's six-point autonomy plan for East Pakistan, Yahya said he had "twice invited Mujib to confer with him" in Islamabad, "and Mujib had twice declined." Yahya confided to Farland that if the Bhutto-Mujib impasse remained unresolved till 3 March, he would defer the parliament session "for a week or two" or later than that, if needed. Yahya did not indicate what would happen if the impasse continued, but he spoke, in a tone of despair, of the "blood and chaos" that might ensue.

Farland, for his part, stressed that the long-standing U.S. policy to uphold Pakistan's integrity "remained precisely as previously confirmed" to Yahya and Bhutto – the United States supported a unified Pakistan. He also told Yahya he wanted to see Mujib "to make sure that he also comprehended our concern about Pakistan's future". Farland worried his "seeing Mujib at this particularly sensitive juncture would likely be subject to considerable public misunderstanding" in Pakistan.

Yahya acknowledged that many in West Pakistan suspected that America favoured an independent East Pakistan. He said reports continued to reach him that the U.S. consul general and USAID officials in Dhaka were giving Awami League contacts such an impression. Yahya's intelligence told him that when Farland visited Dhaka last time upon his return from Washington in January, he had met Mujib.

That report was untrue, Farland protested. He told Yahya he had not met Mujib. Yahya himself was convinced America supported one Pakistan. He assured Farland he would not misunderstand his seeing Mujib in the next few days, which the envoy had planned. On the contrary, Yahya urged Farland to meet Mujib as soon as possible. Farland decided to leave for East Pakistan the next day and requested the consul general in Dhaka to seek an early meeting with Mujib.

Yahya was not Pakistan's first president to suspect America's complicity with Mujib. During General Ayub Khan's rule, which was brought to an end by Yahya in 1969, there were accusations that America supported the military ruler's opponents, a charge Washington consistently – but unconvincingly – denied.

On 18 September 1964, U.S. Ambassador Walter P. McCaughy reassured Ayub of America's steadfast support for his regime. The American officials "would be fully circumspect in all their contacts to insure that none of their actions or relationships could be plausibly

misconstrued as giving aid and comfort to anti-government elements or as constituting intervention in the forthcoming election campaign or in any aspect of the domestic affairs of Pakistan,” McConaughy promised.

His pledge was intended to blunt “systematic efforts of elements unfriendly to the United States to propagate fabricated stories of American sympathy with opposition parties in Pakistan.”

“I said that our people had not been guilty of any such impropriety, but I knew that allegations to this effect had been manufactured out of the whole cloth and that unfortunately they seemed to have been given some degree of credence,” the ambassador reported to the State Department.

Ayub replied that he had heard similar reports, especially about East Pakistan – a statement Yahya would mimic two years later. He said the reports charged the Americans with keeping prejudicial contacts with such opposition leaders as Sheikh Mujib, anti-government student groups and other dissidents. Ayub said the charges asserted that America financed these elements.

“I told him that it was incredible that such preposterous insinuations could be seriously entertained by anyone who knew anything about American policy. I said that as he knew the Americans were mostly gregarious people who liked to get acquainted with all manner of people among whom they lived,” the ambassador wrote to Washington.

Borrowing a phrase Ayub had used earlier in the context of the Pakistanis hobnobbing with communist China, the ambassador said the “Americans could not be expected to ‘go into purdah’ as far as casual social contacts with non-official Bengalis in East Pakistan were concerned. But I assured him that I had issued new instructions to all our people to use the greatest circumspection so as to avoid any even half-way reasonable inference that they were consorting improperly with anti-government elements.”

Ayub had said Pakistan’s representatives could not “go into purdah” so far as contacts with Chinese communists were concerned. He made the comment in response to America’s complaints that Pakistan was consorting with its communist enemy.

Ayub was very pleased with the ambassador’s assurances as was his successor, Yahya, two years later. However, Ayub picked up a book on his desk, whose title alone, he said had been giving him surprise and shock: *The Invisible Government*. It was David Wise and Thomas Ross’ book, which describes how various U.S. government agencies conduct secret operations. He said he hoped that nothing like the operations narrated in the book were actually going on. Pakistan’s foreign office had distributed copies of the book to most of the government officials.

McConaughy wanted to reassure Ayub: “Of course, we were not assisting and would not assist in [sic] any opposition element in Pakistan.” By the same token, he asserted, “Although the United States recognized the key importance of Ayub to Pakistan’s stability and welfare, we were, of course, not in any way intervening in his behalf, either, in the election campaign.” Ayub was facing a formidable challenger – Fatema Jinnah, sister of Pakistan founder M.A. Jinnah – in his re-election bid in 1965.

Five years later, on 25 March 1969, under mounting political unrest, Ayub Khan was forced by army chief General Yahya Khan to quit the stage, ending his eleven-year rule which was kept afloat by technocrats, the military, and the business mughals in West Pakistan. Yahya made it look like Ayub let him take over the government through the backdoor on his own volition, which was nowhere near the truth. Yahya simply pushed him out, but quietly. He later succinctly described his ascension to the presidency: “The people did not bring me to power. I came myself.”

To calm down street agitation and placate the politicians clamoring for civil rights and economic justice, the new military ruler vowed to return Pakistan to an elected administration. Yahya’s real motive was threefold: to keep a strong central government intact, to prevent East Pakistan’s entry into West Pakistan’s power structure, and to stop the Bengalis from getting the national political power proportionate to their share of the nation’s population. The military, however, recognised that East Pakistan’s neglect caused the current crisis and vowed to address the issue their way.

The new military regime promised to eliminate many of the causes for complaints against Ayub. But Yahya Khan’s longer-range political objectives – particularly about East Pakistan – and his probable success in attaining these goals, were obscure.

Under these circumstances, Washington faced a dilemma: how closely to support a government that might or might not win public support and ran the risk of becoming a repressive force striving to preserve the existing social inequalities. Despite these potential hazards, America chose to cast its lot with Pakistan’s new military strongman, whom Nixon’s associates described as a “tough” general – “a splendid product of Sandhurst” with a “good sense of humor” and *pukka* shahib manner.

“Our conclusion is that we should support Yahya, but should seek to expand the leverage of our assistance to increase chances of a satisfactory political solution,” the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan advised the State Department in a cable message, setting the policy tone that would eventually lead America to its worst diplomatic flop in South Asia in years.

Just about two years later, on 22 February 1971, Kissinger sent a memorandum to Nixon to brief him on East Pakistan’s fast brewing turmoil.

“The chances seem to be increasing that we might before long be faced with an internal crisis in Pakistan that could over time have far-reaching implications for our interests in South Asia,” the memo said. “I have ordered some contingency planning and want to describe the situation as it now stands.”

The immediate potential for trouble, Kissinger explained, arose from the hard negotiations that were about to begin over writing Pakistan’s new constitution. The main issue was the power relationship between East and West Pakistan.

The dominant political leaders – Mujib in East Pakistan and Bhutto in West Pakistan – had failed even to begin the process of forming an informal consensus on the new constitution. Yahya remained committed to turning his military government over to the politicians, but vowed not to “preside over the splitting of Pakistan”.

The constituent assembly was scheduled to meet on 3 March to draft a constitution within 120 days for Yahya’s approval. Kissinger continued, in the same memo, that the odds seemed high against the assembly’s success to write a constitution acceptable to the major actors – Mujib, Bhutto and Yahya.

Kissinger predicted that, Mujib planned to stick with his demand for the East wing’s autonomy, and if he did not get his way, he was very likely to declare East Pakistan’s independence.

“This may be a negotiating ploy on his part, but strong and growing provincial nationalism limits Rahman’s flexibility and he has considerable organisational momentum behind his maximum demands,” Kissinger said. “Further evidence of his intentions can be seen in recent approaches he has made to the United States and other diplomats to play a peacemaking role to avoid an East-West civil war, if he does not get his way and makes a unilateral declaration of independence.”

He told Nixon that “a realistic assessment would seem to recognize that there is very little material left in the fabric of the unity of Pakistan. This would argue for adjusting our posture, but against that is the fact that the division of Pakistan would not serve U.S. interests.”

“At a minimum,” Kissinger argued, “it would seem imperative that, in the face of the growing possibility that East and West Pakistan will split, we draw together our contingency planning on how best to protect U.S. interests.”

Nixon underlined the last sentence containing “consul general” at the end and added a handwritten comment in the margin: “Good.” He also underlined a part of the sentence that read “more neutral stance toward Rahman, who is basically friendly toward the United States” and wrote in the margin, “not yet-correct-but not any position which encourages secession,” a phrase that succinctly reflected the policy Nixon would pursue during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971.

## **Bhutto Wants To Be Foreign Minister**

On 28 February 1971, at 9 a.m., Farland met Sheikh Mujib at his house in Dhaka for an hour-long conversation. Mujib greeted the ambassador at his car and escorted him into his house. “It was obvious that he was particularly pleased to see me and welcomed me with great cordiality,” the envoy reported to the State Department. “At the same time, he seemed somewhat nervous and slightly apprehensive as to what the conversation might generate.”

Mujib exchanged a few preliminary social comments, which included his reflection that “our meeting comes at a most critical juncture in Pakistan’s history”. He then “precipitously barged into substantive discussions by asking me, ‘what did I think about the situation?’”

Farland pushed the ball into Mujib’s court. “I told him, as an interested observer, I was concerned about the political impasse between East and West Pakistan.” He then suggested that Mujib, as the Awami League chief, could better interpret the current developments.

Mujib said the political impasse was not due solely to the machinations of Bhutto, but represented a situation that was created by “those very people who had supported Ayub”. He said Bhutto could not possibly have acted alone since he had less than an organized political party. Without the help and leadership of certain West Pakistani military officers, Bhutto’s position would be untenable. It was precisely because of this situation that Bhutto favoured excessive military expenditures, Mujib explained.

When Farland asked whether he thought Bhutto would attend the National Assembly, Mujib said that because the Awami League had “now boxed him in”, he would attend. However, Bhutto, whom Mujib called a “callous cow”, would subsequently take off for the West wing. At that moment, “the life struggle of Bangladesh would begin”.

Farland then asked just how far apart were the People’s Party and the Awami League. Mujib said they were so far apart that he anticipated little or no chance of a consensus. More specifically, the Awami League and he as its chosen leader, could not and would not compromise on the six-point program, which he had made a part of East Pakistan’s life for some ten years.

Mujib said Bhutto wanted to become foreign minister. He also demanded the right to select Pakistan’s president. Capitalising on West Pakistan’s fears of East Pakistan’s separatism, Bhutto had asked that Mujib form a coalition with him. Mujib found Bhutto’s foreign policies abhorrent because of his love for communist China and his intransigent position vis à-vis India. Mujib reflected at length upon his anti-communist position and the dangers China posed to the region. As for India, Mujib felt it was imperative that Bangladesh re-establish good relations with New Delhi and reopen the historic trade routes in the area. Summing up, Mujib said the differences between what Bhutto wanted and what the Bengalis demanded appeared to be insurmountable.

Bhutto was somewhat more extreme in his dislike of India than most other Pakistanis. “The roots of the confrontation between India and Pakistan go deep into our history and will have to continue until the cause of justice triumphs, no matter how heavy the odds,” Bhutto had declared in 1969. He had fewer reservations about close relations with China.

Even within the Ayub government, Bhutto was known as an extremist. During a 1964 conversation with Robert Komer, deputy National Security Adviser to President Lyndon Johnson, Pakistan’s Finance Minister Mohammad Shoaib said, “Bhutto was at one extreme among Pak policymakers. Ayub deliberately kept him in the middle, and didn’t take all Bhutto’s advice.”

Shoaib also told Phil Talbot, assistant secretary of state, that he had inspired the Regional Cooperation for Development – an alliance formed in 1964 including Pakistan, Iran and Turkey – as an alternative to Bhutto’s pressure for new gestures toward China. Shoaib’s idea was to create a security arrangement among the region’s non-Communist Muslim states to shore up Pakistan’s security position without requiring it to turn, as Bhutto preferred, to China for support.

Mujib had no love for communists, and he made it sufficiently clear to the Americans. Indulging in a ten-minute speech, which could have been a part of his political oratory, Mujib told Farland in 1971 that the communists had killed three of his leaders. He, in turn, had promised the communists that for every Awami League member killed, he would kill three of theirs; “This we have done,” he said. Mujib told the envoy the Bengalis were behind him. The small hard-core communists were very much on the run as proven by pro-Chinese Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani’s political disarray.

After noting the time he had spent in prison at the hands of the West Pakistani leadership, Mujib said he had no fear whatsoever of facing the bullet if the unity could not be maintained. He dramatically pointed out that he was unafraid of being jailed or “hacked to pieces”. He said he would not deviate from the mandate that had been the will of his people.

“He culminated this monologue by saying that he did not want separation but rather he wanted a form of confederation in which the people of Bangladesh would get their just and rightful share of foreign aid, and not a mere twenty percent as heretofore. With sixty percent of foreign exchange coming from my country, how can Islamabad justify the crumbs, which they have thrown at us?” Farland reported Mujib as having rhetorically asked.

Moving on to the subject of foreign aid, Mujib said Pakistan faced a dangerous financial condition: its foreign exchange reserves were virtually exhausted. In a sense, Mujib added, this was a blessing in disguise for Bangladesh, as West Pakistan lacked the financial power to subjugate the Bengalis. He said, however, that West Pakistan was begging Japan for substantial financial support and that if this was received, “then they will bang us”.

Mujib pointedly asked Farland if the United States and the consortium would support Bangladesh’s rebuilding. The envoy made no firm

commitment; he merely told Mujib that America had been, and continued to be, interested in the subcontinent's economic well-being.

Mujib then described at length what he considered to be East Pakistan's chances of becoming a viable area, noting the great gas reserves available not only for domestic consumption by a petrochemical industry but also for export to India. Under his leadership, he said, Bangladesh would be self-sufficient in food within two years, the boro crop being one of his primary interests. When Farland pointed to him the almost unbelievable birth rate in East Pakistan, Mujib said birth control would be one of his main objectives.

Mujib's mood then turned thoroughly serious. He said he hesitated to do so, but he felt he should point out that America had a reputation for deserting its friends in the face of disagreeable problems. He said disagreeable problems would expectedly arise in this part of the world, which again would put the United States to test. Mujib's comments suggested he somehow got an impression that America might support East Pakistan's independence, although he was skeptical whether Washington would ultimately stand by him if push came to shove. Quite possibly he himself had sought America's support but was rebuffed, as Kissinger's 22 February memorandum to Nixon suggested.

"The highly uncertain internal situation in Pakistan has forced us to walk a very narrow tightrope. We are not the controlling factor by any means, but our influence and support is sought by the major political leaders. We do have some important interests, and our posture at this juncture is critical to how these interests will be protected in the future," wrote Kissinger, adding he saw a "growing possibility that East and West Pakistan will split."

"The U.S. position has been that we support the unity of Pakistan. This has not been gratuitous. Some Pakistani politicians have charged – for their own purposes – that the United States is plotting East Pakistani secession, and we have taken the obvious position in denying these charges. Thus, our consul general in Dacca has urged Rahman to seek a constitutional decision and has scrupulously avoided any implication of U.S. intervention, if Rahman opts out of a unified Pakistan and a bloodbath ensued.

"However, we could before long be faced with a declaration of East Pakistani independence. Although there is a large negotiating element in current threats of secession, we may face that situation. That raises the issue of whether or not we should be adopting a more neutral stance toward Rahman, who is basically friendly toward the United States, as a hedge against the day when we might have to deal with an independent East Pakistan. A realistic assessment would seem to recognize that there is very little material left in the fabric of the unity of Pakistan. This would argue for adjusting our posture, but against that is the fact that the division of Pakistan would not serve U.S. interests."

Responding to Mujib's comment that the United States had a reputation for deserting its friends, Farland told him that "his opinion was entirely too pat" and he "would be happy to discuss the American role in support of its friends at another time". He maintained that "some credence should be given to the fact that the United States financially assisted Pakistan to the tune of something in excess of four and a half billion dollars". Mujib's retort was that "if the United States would give me one billion dollars, I would make a prosperous Bangladesh a bulwark for democracy."

"All these comments were but background to the key question which the Sheikh wished to ask, i.e., what is the policy of the United States toward Pakistan? With the utmost care, I delineated the U.S. policy, precisely in accordance with the policy guidance position set forth in" a State Department telegram, "and I in no way conveyed a sense of concern" in reference to "Pakistan's future in such a manner as to suggest the unalterable U.S. opposition to Bengali aspirations," Farland reported to the State Department.

Without putting it in the form of a question, Mujib then said it behooved all the friends of Bangladesh to exert maximum influence on "those who would use the force of arms to keep my people in a colonial status". He said he had been a student of world affairs long enough to know the United States and other aid-contributing countries could exert this type of influence, if they desired to do so.

"Since no question was posed, the necessity for an answer was obviated, but it may require an answer sooner than we expect, and hence should be given some serious thought," Farland suggested to Washington. "I had anticipated the possibility that the Sheikh would raise the matter of recognition since he had evidenced interest in this subject as heretofore reported; however, he did not do so."

On 2 March, Mujib responded to Yahya's decision to defer the parliament session by announcing a five-day general strike in East Pakistan. "In this critical hour, it is the sacred duty of each and every Bengali in every walk of life, including government employees, not to cooperate with anti-people forces and instead to do everything in their power to foil the conspiracy against Bangladesh," he declared.

As the Bengalis took to the street responding to Mujib's call, Pakistan's political situation appeared gloomier. On 3 March, Jeanne W. Davis, National Security Council staff secretary, prepared a contingency study on Pakistan. She sent copies to Deputy Defense Secretary David Packard, Under Secretary of State John N. Irwin, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, and Central Intelligence Director Richard Helms.

The paper, which included a briefing about what led Pakistan to this crisis, said Mujib had asserted he would use his absolute majority in parliament to enact a constitution based on his party's autonomist program. But Bhutto had declared he would boycott the session unless Mujib modified the Awami League's six-point program. Because of his landslide mandate, Mujib had little flexibility in modifying his program. However, he preferred a unified federal state of Pakistan with maximum provincial autonomy rather than outright separation.

Bhutto, on the other hand, had tacitly concluded he would let East Pakistan secede – leaving him to govern West Pakistan – rather than accept a weak federal system as planned by the Awami League.

Because of Yahya's postponement of the assembly, the crisis had reached a critical juncture. Unless a compromise was found, secession by the Bengalis or separation of the two wings by mutual consent appeared real, the paper predicted.

## **U.S. Anticipates Use of Force by Yahya**

On 3 March, the State Department sent a cable to the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, which clearly indicated the United States had anticipated Yahya would use the military to suppress the Bengalis. The telegram said that as the Pakistani political crisis deepened with the possibility that the "martial law administration may be prepared to use force to maintain unity," the attitude of the Indian government took on a growing importance. India had the capability to interdict air and sea communication between Pakistan's two wings and "might under certain circumstances intervene militarily", if the Bengalis so requested after a crackdown by the West Pakistanis. Because of this possibility, the department sought an analysis from the embassy about what action India might take that would affect the outcome of Pakistan's political crisis one way or another. The department, however, cautioned the embassy not to approach the Indian government for answers to these questions.

On 11 March, the U.S. consul general in Karachi told the State Department it had further information that Yahya could unleash the military force in East Pakistan. This information came from Dirk Jonganeel, manager, Philips Electric Company Ltd. in Karachi. According to Jonganeel, Lieutenant General Yakub Khan, martial law administrator of East Pakistan, passed through Karachi with his wife on his way to Islamabad. Jonganeel said he had learned from a reliable source that "Yakub has been transferred out of East Pakistan because he refused to be party to the military subjugation of East Pakistan and it is in preparation for this eventuality that Lieutenant General Tikka Khan was assigned to replace him."

The decision to use force in East Pakistan was made secretly on 11 February 1971 by the top generals, including Hamid Khan, S.G.M.M. Pirzada, Gul Hassan Khan, Tikka Khan, Ghulam Umer and Akbar Khan at the army headquarters. The deputy chief of Pakistan's intelligence agency, S.A. Saud, who attended the secret meeting, opposed the idea and leaked it to a senior Bengali officer of the intelligence department. The Bengali, in turn, informed Mujib of the army's decision. Mujib sought help from Governor Vice Admiral S.M. Ahsan and Lieutenant General Sahibzada Yakub Khan, the military commander in East Pakistan, according to G.W. Choudhury, a Yahya adviser who authored *The Last Days of United Pakistan*, published in 1974. Both Ahsan and Yakub Khan opposed the military plan, but they were soon ousted from their positions.

Yahya's plan to suppress the Bengalis was apparently given the final shape in early March. Iqbal F Quadir, a retired vice admiral with the Pakistan Navy, got the hint on 8 March from Admiral Muzaffar Hasan, the navy chief. Quadir, who was about to leave for Paris for a stint as Pakistan's naval attache, had gone to bid farewell to his chief when the admiral told him that a major general, who was visiting Karachi, had mentioned to him in passing that the army would be ready for action in East Pakistan by 17 March. Quadir later discovered that the major general was Akbar Khan, the military intelligence chief.

Long before the situation reached this crescendo, the Americans saw East Pakistan splitting from the West. On 20 February 1969, after Ayub Khan's roundtable conference with opposition leaders collapsed, Thomas L. Hughes, director of intelligence at the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the State Department, raised such a possibility. Pakistan, he noted, was in a "situation in which political demands are rapidly reaching a level which can no longer be contained within the political system".

"In East Pakistan, opposition to Ayub has taken on strong overtones of an anti-West Pakistani sentiment to the point that secession can no longer be ruled out as a possible consequence of the political convulsion," he observed. Hughes concluded that Ayub's "failure to build a solidly based political system has come home to roost; the country will be fortunate if it emerges from this period of stress as a single entity."

On 22 February 1971, in a memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger said Mujib was "planning to stick with his demands for the virtual autonomy of East Pakistan and if he does not get his way – which is very likely – to declare East Pakistan's independence. This may be a negotiating ploy on his part, but strong and growing provincial nationalism limits Rahman's flexibility and he has considerable organizational momentum behind his maximum demands. Further evidence of his intentions can be seen in recent approaches he has made to U.S. and other diplomats to play a peacemaking role to avoid an East-West civil war, if he does not get his way and makes a unilateral declaration of independence."

Again, on 3 March, America prepared an analysis of the origin of the East Pakistan crisis, with a prognosis of where the crisis might lead this South Asian nation, a staunch Washington ally, in its fight against communism.

The report correctly assessed that the 1970 parliament elections resulted in a nearly complete polarisation of Pakistan's political forces. In the East wing, the Awami League, campaigning on full provincial autonomy, won virtually all the seats and secured a small but absolute majority in the National Assembly. In foreign affairs, the Awami League favoured reconciliation with India. In the West wing, a substantial majority of the seats went to the leftist Pakistan People's Party, which advocated a central government with substantial powers and a policy of continuing confrontation with India over Kashmir. The leaders of the two parties had conferred but had, in effect, agreed only to oppose each other's constitutional program.

Yahya, whose power to arbitrate was greatly diminished by Mujib's landslide election victory, had summoned the National Assembly to convene in Dhaka on 3 March 1971. However, confronted with the political impasse, on 1 March he had postponed the assembly indefinitely to give the politicians time to resolve their differences. Mujib intended to use his absolute majority to enact a constitution based on his six-point program. Bhutto would not attend the session unless Mujib modified his autonomy plan. Several other West Pakistan lawmakers from smaller parties aligned with Bhutto in boycotting the session.

As outlined in the previous study, this report also found that because of his landslide mandate Mujib had little flexibility in modifying his program, although he and his party were believed to have preferred remaining in a unified federal state of Pakistan, with maximum provincial autonomy, rather than secede. Bhutto and his followers, on the other hand, might have tacitly concluded that they would be prepared to let the East Pakistanis secede – leaving themselves to govern a residual state in West Pakistan – rather than accept a weak federal system based on the Awami League program.

As a result of Yahya's assembly postponement, the crisis had reached a critical juncture. Unless a compromise formula could be devised, secession by the Bengalis or separation of the two wings by mutual consent had become real possibilities.

"Our consistent position has been that U.S. interests are better served by a unified Pakistan than by its separation into two independent states – West Pakistan with a population of about 61 million and East Pakistan with about 76 million," the document said. "We have concluded that an independent East Pakistan would be more vulnerable to internal instability, economic stagnation and external subversion than an East Pakistan affiliated with West Pakistan. We have also concluded that the East Pakistanis provide a moderating influence over West Pakistani hostility toward India. Finally, we have recognized that we have had no realistic alternative but to support Pakistan's unity if we were to maintain satisfactory relations with the government in Islamabad."

The Americans concluded that as a practical matter their ability to influence the course of these events was very limited. The special relationship that they maintained with Pakistan until the late 1960s had ended, with Islamabad essentially pulling itself out of the regional military alliance of SEATO, and with it the leverage it once had in influencing Pakistan's political developments.

"All evidence pointed to the fact that Yahya was doing his utmost to effect an accommodation between the two contending forces in his country to preserve a unified state," the Americans concluded, and "we see little we could effectively do to help him except to maintain our general posture of cooperation with his government and to encourage him in his efforts as long as they stand a reasonable chance of success."

Giving an outline of how things could unfold in the event the two wings separated, they noted that both would want to maintain viable ties with the United States as an offset to their relations with other major external powers – India, the U.S.S.R. and China. "Both will keenly desire



continuation of U.S. economic assistance and will seek our support on various political issues. Both may also desire military and public safety assistance from us, at least in training and the sale of equipment. In short, both states will want friendly and cooperative relations with the United States – a desire which will be in our interest to reciprocate and to support within the capability of our resource and in the light of our interests in the South Asian region as a whole.”

An independent East Pakistan would undoubtedly face formidable problems, especially in the economic sphere and eventually in the political, the report correctly predicted. However, these were problems that would inevitably arise whether East Pakistan were independent or merely autonomous within a federated Pakistan. Politically, it said, the Awami League under Mujib would restore democratic government in the new state and enjoy wide popular support from the start, judging from the overwhelming size of its mandate in the recent elections. It would move to establish cooperative relations with India because of external security as well as trade. At the same time, it would cultivate good relations with many other countries to avoid excessive dependence on any one power and to tap the resources of as many aid donors as possible, the Americans concluded.

“In the present circumstances, we could perhaps affect the timetable or modalities of East Pakistani secession through our posture toward Mujib and his followers, or perhaps influence the West Pakistani response to it. However, we could not deter a move for independence if the East Pakistanis should make the ultimate decision to establish their own country. Nor could we dissuade dominant political forces in West Pakistan, notably Bhutto and his followers, from pursuing a course of obstruction which would result in driving East Pakistan into secession, if they should choose to do so,” the policy paper outlined.

Despite the intelligence assessment that East and West Pakistan were falling apart, policymakers in Washington consistently maintained that America’s interests were better served by a unified Pakistan than by its separation into two independent states – West Pakistan with a population of about 61 million and East Pakistan with about 76 million. Still, they remained open to the possible re-partition of South Asia and dealing with another new nation – Bangladesh.

“While we have regarded our interests as better served by a unified Pakistan, we should be able to adjust to the emergence of two separate states and to maintain satisfactory relations with them without serious damage to our interests,” the study concluded.

The United States had been aware of the Bengali sentiment against West Pakistan at least since 1957, when Major General Iskandar Mirza ruled Pakistan. When America was deciding whether or not to support Mirza’s presidential rule, the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan told the State Department that East Pakistan would interpret such an approval as Washington’s support for the “Punjabi tyranny and victimization of their province.”

The American diplomats favored a policy that would iron out the East-West differences. America’s objective, the embassy concluded, was to promote an orderly transition from the government by a small bureaucratic clique to an effective parliamentary system run by political parties supporting foreign and domestic policies in line with U.S. aims.

“Imposition of the president’s rule would lead many to conclude that the representative regime cannot exist in the same system with the expanded Pakistan military strength,” the report contended.

According to the embassy, the “Awami League remains predominantly secular and middle class and is committed to parliamentary practices. Its program of provincial autonomy reflects desires of the bulk of population, which did not believe the dictatorship would solve any of Pakistan’s basic problems.” The mission suggested it should be made known to Mirza.

From the early stage of Pakistan, the Bengalis confronted West Pakistan’s domination, a state of affairs that worried the Americans. U.S. Ambassador Horace A. Hildreth related one incident to the State Department on 24 September 1956. During a conversation the previous week, he had confronted Mirza with “coffee-shop gossip” that the H35.S. Suhrawardy, Pakistan’s prime minister, by phone on 16 September to allow the foreign minister to accept an invitation to a conference in London. When the ambassador asked Mirza about the rumor, he denied putting pressure on the prime minister.

The following week, “Mirza had obviously forgotten the previous conversation and said bluntly he had put pressure on Suhrawardy,” saying to the prime minister: “When the Nasser invitation comes, you accept the invitation within half an hour.”

Suhrawardy had blamed the previous governments for pursuing a foreign policy that was never explained to the public. Within a few hours after being sworn in as prime minister, he told the American ambassador in a private conversation that he “felt that previous governments had been very inept, negligent and stupid in not explaining the foreign policy to the people and pointing out the reasons and advantages for it and that he intended to correct this.”

When the ambassador later revealed this to Mirza, the general threw a sarcastic question to Hildreth: “Well, when is he going to commence?”

Mirza then stated he had drafted a letter to the prime minister on foreign policy, which he had not yet sent as he was waiting for the proper provocation and proper time. When the ambassador said he would be very much interested in seeing his views, Mirza left the room and came back with a four-page memo and let him read a copy.

“It was a stinging reaffirmation of a very strong pro-West, pro-Free World, anti-Communist foreign policy. It emphasized that the government of Pakistan in recent months by weaseling is losing stature and friends in both camps,” Hildreth reported to Washington.

Mirza said in the memo that the “government countenanced constant criticism of the United States and the previous government had not displayed any guts in explaining the foreign policy and so far Suhrawardy was not doing any better.”

Mirza’s action followed the publication of a *New York Times* article by A.M. Rosenthal on 10 September 1957. Mirza was irritated by the article because it alleged he opposed making Suhrawardy prime minister for fear that the Bengali leader would not back Mirza for president in any future elections.

Mirza told the ambassador that “he had told Suhrawardy that he would back him to the hilt, except if he washed out from foreign policy or meddled with the military and if Suhrawardy double crossed him. In these respects he, Mirza, too could play dirty, and Suhrawardy would have a revolution on his hands.”

Commenting on Mirza’s statements, Hildreth told the State Department the general “showed every indication that he intended to be in control of the country, but would back Suhrawardy so long as Suhrawardy did not cross him on foreign policy.”

Mirza also told the envoy that “people long had been accusing him of wanting to be a dictator, but he had already shown time and again that if

he could avoid a military government he would go to great ends to do so.” Mirza then added he hoped the United States would understand if he had taken any drastic action.

The State Department, which shared the embassy’s concern over Mirza’s planned authoritarian rule, was “reluctant to take any action which could be construed as interference in internal political affairs [of] Pakistan and thus would prefer at present not to make suggested representations to Mirza.”

With what would later prove to be disastrous for both South Asia and the United States, America pursued the same hands-off policy during the initial phase of the 1971 South Asian crisis, lest it face accusation by Yahya of interfering in Pakistan’s internal affairs.

Mujib’s 7 March address in Dhaka relieved the Americans, who had anticipated that the Bengali leader could opt for outright secession from Pakistan, thus putting America’s long-pursued South policy in disarray. Washington felt that his speech, which was broadcast live in East Pakistan and attended by an estimated one million Bengalis, was a step back from a call for immediate independence. Instead of announcing an outright separation, Mujib called for a continuation of the peaceful non-cooperation movement, including the closure of all government offices and educational institutions. He said he would consider attending the National Assembly scheduled for 25 March if martial law was terminated, the troops in East Pakistan sent to their barracks and power returned to the elected representatives. His retreat appeared tactical. He made it clear that something very close to independence – i.e., his people’s emancipation – was his goal and that his movement would not be deflected until that was achieved.

That Mujib quite openly took issue with Yahya was similarly noteworthy. He accused the general of “submitting to the declaration of a minority”, a reference to West Pakistan and Bhutto. Mujib asserted that his Awami League was Pakistan’s sole legitimate source of authority, an assertion the West Pakistanis found hard to swallow.

“Our embassy in Islamabad believes that Rahman’s goal remains unchanged – “emancipation” of East Pakistan from West Pakistani domination. This could still conceivably mean “full provincial autonomy” within a united Pakistan. But it is just as likely, if not more so, that Rahman has come to believe firmly that the freedom he seeks is only attainable by outright independence,” Kissinger told Nixon on 13 March 1971.

Mujib’s speech on 7 March suggested he wanted to achieve his goal by gradually asserting power without risking a direct confrontation with the army that could have possibly followed a unilateral declaration of independence.

The other element in this delicate political equation – Z.A. Bhutto – remained relatively quiet. Since triggering the current crisis in mid-February by refusing to attend the constituent assembly, Bhutto had worked to further consolidate his support in the West wing and at least to appear more conciliatory. The differences between Bhutto and Mujib on dividing powers between the center and the provinces could be reconciled or at least papered over if the constituent assembly met.

Noting that Yahya would shortly visit Dhaka and meet with Mujib, Kissinger outlined three scenarios that could then develop: Yahya could decide not to take Mujib’s challenge lying down and to retaliate, perhaps to the extent of arresting Mujib and the other leaders, and attempting to clamp a military lid on East Pakistan. In doing so, Kissinger added, Yahya faced two basic problems: Mujib’s was a Gandhian-type non-violent, non-cooperation campaign that made it harder to justify repression; and the West Pakistanis lacked the military capacity to put down a full-scale revolt over a long period.

A static waiting game could develop with neither the army nor the civilians prepared to take a bold initiative to break the deadlock, and each hoping the other would break first. This was where Mujib would probably prefer to continue the status quo for a while longer so that he could gradually take de facto control of East Pakistan without forcing a showdown, he surmised.

Finally, Yahya could make more tactical political moves to let Mujib or Bhutto probe for accommodation and buy more time without giving up anything. This had been his operational strategy so far but it might be that just about all of the possibilities in this sphere had been played out.

“In short, the Pakistan crisis was far from over and could suddenly flare up again,” Kissinger cautioned.

## Pakistan in Trouble: Mujib's Secret Message to America

By mid-March 1971, America had concluded that the Bengalis were marching on a road towards an independent country. Pakistan's political crisis had moved beyond holding the parliamentary session and framing a constitution.

"The election results themselves doomed this possibility by, first of all, affording the Awami League the unexpected majority by which to ram through a constitution of its making, and secondly, by cutting Bhutto out of any role other than the chief minister of Punjab or the leader of the opposition in the National Assembly," the U.S. consul general in Dhaka, Archer Blood, wrote to the State Department in March.

What was needed to keep at least a vestige of Pakistan's unity was a solution that "would give something to Bhutto, something to Mujib and something to Yahya and the army".

One such solution, according to a suggestion from the United States was to form a confederation, allowing Bhutto to become prime minister of West Pakistan and making Mujib prime minister of Bangladesh. Yahya could become president of the confederation and the military would receive its sustenance from both the wings and be stationed in both parts.

But this solution would have created a big problem in foreign affairs, given Mujib and Bhutto held diametrically opposite views on relations to India – Mujib favored keeping warm ties, but Bhutto was steadfast on waging a fight for Kashmir. Another weakness of the confederation plan was in the eyes of Yahya, who considered it as a half-step towards eventual full independence for East Pakistan.

Still, Blood saw no other feasible alternative than some form of a confederation – as outlined in Mujib's six-point plan, which proposed a federal government with maximum powers given to provinces, especially in economic matters.

"The possibility of Mujib compromising significantly on the six points to permit the National Assembly to agree on a constitution seems out of the question," the consul general argued. "It would be political suicide for Mujib. His people would not tolerate it. We have passed that point in time. The ominous prospect of a military crackdown is much more than a possibility, but it would only delay and ensure independence of Bangladesh."

On 7 March, Mujib held a mass rally in Dhaka, asking the Bengalis to be ready to fight for independence. Simultaneously, he effectively took control of East Pakistan and ordered the civil servants to follow his instructions. Yahya's grip barely extended beyond the military garrisons dominated by the West Pakistani commanders.

Despite the open rift with West Pakistan, Mujib apparently kept the possibility of remaining within one Pakistan under a loose federation as outlined in his six-point plan. Or so, at least, the Americans thought. From Dhaka, U.S. Consul General Archer Blood sent a message to Washington on 10 March 1971 to this effect, quoting a purportedly secret message from Mujib, brought to him by some Alamgir Rahman who was identified in a State Department telegram only as an Awami League leader.

"Alamgir Rahman came to see me this morning with what he said was a message from Mujib," Blood wrote. "According to Alamgir, Mujib had wanted Yahya to come to Dacca for talks, and I was greatly relieved at the news that Yahya was, in fact, coming. Mujib wanted very much to work out with Yahya some political settlement that would avoid bloodshed, satisfy Bengali aspirations, and preserve some vestige of link with Pakistan. Alamgir opined that it's now too late to talk in terms of the six-point constitution, but perhaps some solution can be found along the lines of a confederation, with separate constitutions for East and West Pakistan, and one army and one foreign ministry."

### Mujib Seeks U.S. Help

Mujib's question, said Alamgir, was this: Did the United States want to see a military confrontation with the prospect of eventual communist domination of Bengal, or would it prefer a political solution to the current crisis? In essence, Mujib sought America's help to bring about a solution to the crisis.

"I told Alamgir that Mujib's question, put that way, was easy to answer. We naturally hoped for a peaceful political solution in lieu of bloodshed: We were gratified to learn that Mujib is also thinking in these terms, and we interpret Yahya's willingness to come to Dacca as evidence he, too, is desirous of achieving a peaceful solution. We hope both sides would approach talks in the spirit of a compromise.

"Alamgir then said Mujib wanted to know if the United States would be willing to indicate to Yahya our hopes for a political solution to the current crisis. I said I did not know if this thought had been conveyed to Yahya in Islamabad, but I would undertake to suggest to the charge [d'affaires in Islamabad] that, if an appropriate occasion presented itself before Yahya's departure, he might note to Yahya our hopes for a political solution to the problems facing Pakistan."

Blood ended his dispatch with a comment. "Recognize, of course, that the expression of hope for a 'political solution' as distinct from a 'peaceful' solution carries the implication that we would not be happy about a military repression as the martial law authority's solution to the crisis. Nonetheless, given the urgency of the situation, I would hope we could be somewhat more positive in this regard."

Despite their reluctance to support an independent East Pakistan, the Americans had begun seriously thinking that soon they might have to deal with a new nation in South Asia; this was long before the civil war that engulfed Pakistan in 1971. Based on this assumption, they had started examining what they would face if East Pakistan separated from West Pakistan. Washington believed that an independent East Pakistan would face formidable economic and political problems. Sheikh Mujib would restore democracy in the new state, and enjoy wide popular support from the start. The new nation would establish cooperative relations with India for external security and trade. It would cultivate good relations with other countries to avoid excessive dependence on any one power and to tap the resources of as many aid donors as possible.

The Awami League, which emerged from the elections as more of a nationalist mass movement than just a tight political organisation, however,

would be hard-pressed to fulfill its program and satisfy people's aspirations. It would face defections from its own ranks and mounting opposition from radical leftist elements outside. The long-term outlook suggested increasing radicalisation and political instability in East Pakistan.

Economically, an independent East Pakistan could maintain its existing low growth rate for some years after separation, assuming improved mobilisation of local resources. It would enjoy exclusive benefit of the foreign exchange earnings from jute, which had been thus far shared with West Pakistan. It would also benefit from trade with India and an infusion of huge foreign aid. Its economy was bound to suffer in the long term, however, because of the population burden. The Americans wondered how the new state could, in the long run, meet its basic needs, let alone improve its economy, even with sizable external aid.

In contrast to the situation in East Pakistan, the Americans maintained a new state in West Pakistan would most likely be organized around a left-trending populist type of government dominated by Bhutto. The military would remain an important element in the political equation. An authoritarian regime headed by Bhutto and backed by the armed forces was conceivable. Given the military's influence and the more favorable economic outlook, the chances for stability appeared somewhat better in West Pakistan than in East Pakistan, according to calculations made by the Americans.

Externally, a new West Pakistan would continue a hostile policy towards India, which could spell trouble for its security and economic progress as it would entail excessive defense expenditures. The state might move closer to China, while trying to maintain viable relations with both the United States and the Soviet Union.

Compared with East Pakistan, an independent West's economic prospects were much better. The new state should be able to maintain its forward movement for some years to come with continuing foreign aid. But it, too, faced a potentially serious population problem, which could badly retard its economic progress.

Both the nations would seek aid from the United States. But before America would even receive requests for economic aid, Washington would face serious diplomatic issues, if events in Pakistan ultimately started rearranging South Asian political realities. The Awami League leaders had already sounded out the American officials on the posture Washington would take towards an independent East Pakistan. Even if the separation was uncertain, they could approach America for support against possible West Pakistani resistance. At the same time, the West Pakistani leaders, including Yahya Khan, could probe the U.S. position regarding Pakistan's unity.

To deal with these contending forces, the Americans outlined three alternative options:

First, Washington could maintain its existing official position, telling Pakistan: "Our policy has been and continues to be to support independence, unity and integrity of Pakistan. However, this is your country and how you organize and deal with its problems is your business."

Second, America could tell the Bengalis that it favored Pakistan's unity, but "we recognize that there is a rising sense of nationalism in East Pakistan and that we would be prepared to adjust our policies to the evolving situation."

And third, "we could, while maintaining our present public position, privately urge President Yahya to make every effort to reach an accommodation with Mujibur Rahman, which would enable a single Pakistan to continue, even though its federal powers were limited to defense and foreign affairs, and even though Bhutto's party refused to cooperate in the process of government."

Unless and until separation was certain, the United States decided, "any shift in our position would be against our continuing interest in seeing Pakistan remain unified. Any softening on our part would contribute to the process of disintegration."

The Americans were concerned that their encouragement of East Pakistan's separatism would quickly get back to West Pakistan and deepen suspicions among some West Pakistanis that Washington wanted to split their country. "It would, thereby, prejudice our relations with the present West Pakistanis as well as our future relations with a possible independent state in West Pakistan," they concluded.

"We, therefore, prefer at this stage to continue to maintain a balanced posture between West and East Pakistanis. It serves to reassure those with whom we have to continue to deal in West Pakistan, while leaving the impression with the East Pakistanis that we are not inflexible, although we would prefer [as Mujib presently seems to] a mutually agreeable constitutional system within a unified state."

Washington felt that Yahya was doing his best to bring Mujib and Bhutto closer, according to some analysts at the State Department. "He does not need any urging from us in this matter and we can realistically offer little or nothing that will materially affect the situation. Moreover, an effort by us to urge compromise could be resented as unwarranted interference in Pakistan's internal affairs".

Yahya knew very well when he postponed the parliamentary session that his move could provoke a backlash in East Pakistan. He figured the alternative to the postponement would be even worse. His two main options were to postpone the session and risk an immediate confrontation with East Pakistan, or to hold the session and risk an immediate fight with his army.

Because he would eventually have to reject an autonomy constitution, Yahya figured he would inevitably provoke a confrontation with the East Pakistanis in a few months. So, he could not compromise with Mujib or move closer to Bhutto without jeopardising his own power base and risking his ouster by hardline military elements. In short, Yahya decided to risk a confrontation with East Pakistan in the slight hope that if he pushed all the parties to the brink, a compromise might evolve from their coming to grips with the consequences of dividing Pakistan. Given the sentiment within West Pakistan's political-military establishment, he saw no other realistic choice.

The looming Bengali-Punjabi fight assumed a greater significance for the Americans as it shook Washington's core policy in the subcontinent. The United States had held since India woke up at midnight that a stable South Asia free from outside influence served America's interests better. So the CIA argued that a constitutional government along the line advocated by the Awami League would hurt America's best interest. A divided Pakistan would leave West Pakistan under the control of an anti-West demagogue, Bhutto, popularly known in Washington as the "Yankee-baiting foreign minister" of Pakistan and "a drunkard".

On the other hand, a confederation reserving foreign policy and defense to the central government would check Bhutto's strongly pro-Chinese and anti-Indian policies; it was expected that he would not control the Pakistani military as he had an excellent chance of doing if the country split. So went the logic for American support for a united Pakistan.

Still, the Americans feared that the point at which East Pakistan's separation became inevitable could rapidly be reached and "we should be prepared to adjust our posture quickly to take account of this eventuality. Much will hinge on East Pakistani reactions to Yahya's decision to postpone the convening of the assembly."

The Americans concluded that if separation became imminent, but before it was announced, the United States should let the East Pakistanis

know privately that “we would recognize the new state and be prepared to conduct normal relations with its government.” To support Pakistan’s unity at this stage, they argued, would unnecessarily alienate the “Bengali leaders with whom we would want to be on good terms in the future”.

However, if East Pakistan’s leaders “should request U.S. intercession or intervention to forestall an anticipated West Pakistan military action, we should decline on the grounds that we do not consider a West Pakistani military intervention likely,” if Washington assumed that to be the case at the time. “We should firmly reject any suggestion of a U.S. military involvement. If East Pakistan publicly declares its independence and requests our recognition, we should grant it,” the CIA further advocated.

How then should America react if East Pakistan declared independence and West Pakistan took military action?

“We think it was very unlikely that West Pakistan would intervene militarily to attempt to preserve the unity of Pakistan by force,” the analysis inaccurately predicted. “Given the anticipated vehemence of the Bengali response, the limited strength of West Pakistani forces now in the East [one army division and a few aircraft], and the difficulties of reinforcement from the West, the risks of military intervention would appear to be excessively high. Moreover, there would probably be a general lack of public and political interest in West Pakistan in preventing a Bengali secession. Rather than undertake military action, most of them would prefer to let East Pakistan go its way.”

West Pakistan would refrain from military action also because such a step could bring the Indians to the aid of the Bengalis.

“We believe India considers that a unified Pakistan is in its interest. But if separation appears imminent, India would prefer an independent state in the East to a united Pakistan dominated by the West,” Washington concluded. Moreover, the United States believed that India would not send troops into East Pakistan to avoid the risk of escalation in the West.

“Despite the unlikelihood of military intervention, we, nonetheless, should plan for it on a contingency basis on the theory that an irrational action is always possible,” the intelligence study said. “If a West Pakistani intervention becomes imminent or actually occurs, we would have an interest in doing what we could to avoid bloodshed and restore peace, and to prevent the conflict from escalating beyond a purely East-West Pakistan clash. We should be willing to risk irritating the West Pakistanis in the face of such a rash act on their part, and the threat of stopping aid should give us considerable leverage.”

As the foreign policy experts began chalking out America’s future course of action towards Pakistan, Washington opted to remain neutral and uninvolved, at least for the moment. America made it clear, though, that it favored Pakistan’s unity and that it wanted the Pakistanis to decide their country’s future. Some Americans still saw merit in pressing Yahya to align himself with Bhutto’s foes and compromise with Mujib, who was considered pro-American. But Washington held off making the suggestion to Yahya, fearing an army backlash. The State Department also opposed getting involved, but kept the option open for the future.

To the Americans, Pakistan’s major political figures represented a cocktail of ideologies and characters: Yahya, Mujib and Bhutto possessed different ideological outlooks. Yahya, whose power base was the military and the economic elite who opposed compromise with Bhutto to avoid an “equitable distribution of wealth,” was fairly conservative. Bhutto, a leftist and populist, did not want to accommodate East Pakistan because he wanted to control a strong central government.

Yahya and Bhutto, however, had one thing in common; both opposed Mujib. Moreover both were committed to ensuring that neither gained a dominant position in any future Pakistani government. Mujib, concerned mainly with East Pakistan, remained steadfast on autonomy. He favored normal relations with India, putting himself in further conflict with Yahya and Bhutto, who both held a fairly hardline position towards India.

The open political process provided a ray of hope for a possible understanding amongst Mujib, Bhutto and Yahya, despite their conflicting ideologies and political interests. But the scope for a compromise dimmed, with Yahya’s announcement to postpone the parliamentary session. The United States concluded that Mujib had almost decided to opt out of Pakistan. In fact, the Awami League leader indicated this when he talked with Farland on 28 February 1971, asking the ambassador about U.S. aid to an independent East Pakistan. Farland appeared amenable to supporting Mujib.

Mujib had called for Pakistan’s withdrawal from the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), both non-communist military blocs. But, a CIA analysis concluded, “despite his neutralist statements and his leftist tendencies in domestic programs, he was still basically pro-Western.”

Still, America remained unimpressed with Mujib’s foreign policy credentials, which Washington felt were virtually non-existent. A CIA study – *Pakistan, India, and Communist China: A Change in Relations?* – released on 19 January 1971, concluded that “Mujib has devoted himself to winning greater autonomy for East Pakistan and has never developed a comprehensive foreign policy.”

However, there were signs which way he would swing; Mujib did not view India in the same light as Pakistan’s previous rulers had. With the army representing West Pakistan’s interests and with too few troops in the East Pakistan army to protect East Bengal, the Bengalis concluded that it would better serve their interests if negotiations were held with India rather than engaging them in confrontation.

As the crisis unfolded in 1971, Washington faced a tough question: If East Pakistan seceded, how active should the United States be in trying to avoid bloodshed? National Security staff members, Saunders and Hoskinson, hinted in a memo what they expected to come up and what they wanted to do: “We are, after all, witnessing the possible birth of a new nation of over 70 million people in an unstable area of Asia and, while not the controlling factor, we could have something to do with how this comes about – peacefully or by bloody civil war.”

To answer this question, Kissinger sent a memorandum on 16 February to state and defense secretaries and the CIA director, for a contingency study to outline the possible range of U.S. reactions to East Pakistan’s move towards secession. The study inaccurately dismissed Yahya’s possible military intervention in East Pakistan.

Ominous signs of a looming crisis in East Pakistan were, however, apparent to some other American intelligence agencies long before the army crackdown in March. On 8 December, Ray S. Cline, director of Intelligence and Research at the State Department, sent a brief to Secretary of State William Rogers, telling him what the future held in store for Pakistan in light of Sheikh Mujib’s election victory.

The Awami League’s sweep in East Pakistan and the People’s Party’s surprising lead in West Pakistan would make it difficult to strike a deal between the two wings, said the report prepared before the complete election results were announced in Pakistan. It observed:

“While an accommodation is still possible, it has become more problematical. With an absolute majority, the Awami League may be tempted to press too hard for more autonomy than the West Pakistanis are prepared to accept. Even if Sheikh Mujib recognizes the dangers inherent in such a course, efforts on his part to restrain his followers may risk his position – and the majority.”

Bhutto's emergence as a prominent figure in the West also complicated the Pakistan situation. His radical appeals were an anathema to the establishment, and thus raised fresh doubts in the Yahya regime's minds as to the popular government's value.

Bhutto had not openly criticized Awami League's autonomy demands, but he preferred a strong center. He was unlikely to join forces with Mujib on an issue that could in any way diminish his newly achieved position in West Pakistan. Bhutto's opposition to anything more than token provincial autonomy would leave the Awami League dependent on the few scattered West Pakistani centrists as it sought true autonomy.

The key to a resolution of the autonomy issue was Yahya Khan. He was assumed to have accepted the need to work with Mujib, but this decision was doubtless predicated on the belief that the West Pakistani ruling elite would be well-represented by centrists who could work with and control the Awami League leader and thus protect West Pakistani interests. Bhutto had destroyed this belief.

Since the constituent assembly must write a constitution in 120 days, a task made more difficult by the assembly's composition, and since Yahya must approve any proposed constitution, it appeared less certain that martial law would see its end nor a civilian government would be formed. But, the report predicted, if a constitution embodying what the Awami League deemed to be adequate autonomy could not be framed or was rejected, the Bengali reaction could well be secession.

On 4 March, Saunders and Hoskinson prepared yet another review, showing a deteriorating situation in East Pakistan. This memo followed Mujib's decision not to attend the roundtable conference that Yahya had called after postponing the parliamentary session.

## Mujib Confuses America

Mujib's action confused the Americans, who felt that the Bengali leader had possibly slammed the door on the East-West compromise by dumping Yahya's planned conference. However, they were not entirely sure what Mujib actually wanted at that point; they were merely taking hints from his press statements. Mujib had made off-the-record statements to several foreign journalists that he could announce a sort of independence for East Pakistan in his 7 March public rally. He, however, went on to say that the East and West wings should write their own constitutions and then discuss how to link the two wings.

The Americans took this statement as a sign that Mujib kept "the door open to some sort of confederal relationship". So, they advocated against "jumping too soon to the recognition of the East Pakistani independence," if Mujib opted out of Pakistan.

As Mujib stepped up the political pressure, Yahya put his military machine into action. Washington received reports of troop movement from West Pakistan to East, with indications that the military wanted to strike against the East Pakistan leaders. An earlier review by Washington had ruled out an attack, but that assessment had become seemingly less and less true. The CIA's latest report predicted a violent reaction from the Bengalis if Islamabad launched a crackdown.

The State Department worried it might soon have to grapple with another question if Yahya unleashed military force on the Bengalis: how to deal with the Bengalis working at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington. They had already approached the department about their relationship with the United States, should East Pakistan declare independence. They feared expulsion from the embassy, and the deputy chief of the mission, an East Pakistani, would become *de facto* charge d'affaires of a new Bangladesh Embassy. After Mujib fell short of announcing outright independence on 7 March, both the Bengalis and the department got a breathing room.

On 15 March, Joseph Sisco, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, sent a memorandum to Rogers after Mujib declared that his party, which had won 288 of 300 seats of the provincial legislature, took control of East Pakistan's administration. The memo's headline, "Mujib Takes Over East Pakistan; Yahya Flies to Dacca," succinctly captured the prevailing situation in East Pakistan.

Mujib's announcement contained thirty-five directives to take over the administration. His move was carefully planned. By taking this step, Mujib had directly confronted Yahya, but avoided an unqualified declaration of independence.

Under the circumstances, Yahya apparently had only two options, and either one would further weaken Pakistan's already fragile unity. If he acquiesced in Mujib's step, he would have forfeited his martial law powers, at least in the East, and would be hard-pressed to retain them in the West. If the president or the military generals decided "to resist Mujib's action by force, East Pakistan would be engulfed in a struggle between the military and the Bengali nationalists, the outcome of which can only be eventual independence of Bengal and the breaking of all ties with West Pakistan – unless, as seems unlikely in the long run, the army can successfully contain a rebellion," Sisco predicted.

Yahya found himself between the proverbial rock and a hard place not only in East Pakistan but also in West Pakistan. He faced problems in West Pakistan, with Bhutto demanding that power be given to the majority parties in each wing. Bhutto's speech in Karachi calling for power transfer, in fact, might have triggered Mujib's action. Bhutto had decided that his chances of getting power in West Pakistan were best enhanced by a total split of Pakistan, or even nearly so. However, Bhutto had less opportunity to act than Mujib because the army was strong in the West and could probably contain a rebellion. The events cast further doubt on the continued unity in Pakistan. Yahya's response would be the most important determining factor.

Although in the December 1970 elections, the Bengalis opted for autonomy, their opinions had since hardened as a result of the crackdown in March. The best that West Pakistan could have expected was a restoration of conditions that existed under Ayub.

Under such a system, routine and low-level administrative duties would go to Bengalis loyal to Islamabad. The West Pakistanis would have the ultimate control, and the army would remain the final arbiter of power.

The two areas would remain as a single economic unit. The central government would seek to cope with East Bengal's formidable economic problems. But a huge majority of the population would remain strongly disaffected and launch sporadic uprisings. Pakistan's talk about enlisting loyalist Bengalis in large numbers appeared nothing more than wishful thinking.

The political complexion and outlook of an independent Bangladesh were extremely difficult to forecast. If it came into being rather soon, and if Mujib and the principal Awami League leaders were still alive and permitted to return, they would quickly take over. Mujib's political and economic philosophies were essentially moderate ones; he wished to develop good relations with India and adopt a generally balanced and neutralist international posture. In domestic affairs, he advocated a mild type of socialism, emphasising an improvement in the living standards of the Bengalis and a concerted attack on the many economic problems.

On the other hand, if the fighting prolonged, the prospects of a takeover by a radical leadership could rise. "We know almost nothing about such

radicals; in recent years the politics of East Bengali protest have focused almost exclusively on the issue of autonomy. Nonetheless, given the large number of Bengali extremists in India and the ease of interchange of ideas and people between the two regions, radical movements could develop extremely rapidly,” an American intelligence estimate concluded.

Whatever its government, an independent Bangladesh would, in the short term, have some things going for it. Relatively speaking for an underdeveloped country, its balance of payments problems would not be bad, thanks to its large current exports of jute. It would almost certainly repudiate the large debts to West Pakistan and the outside world incurred in its name. Able to trade freely with India, as it had not been in the past, it could buy many goods at lower prices.

But Bangladesh would face serious problems both in the short and long term. With seventy to eighty million people packed into an area the size of Florida, which is similar to Bangladesh in size, unable to grow enough food to feed itself, almost devoid of natural resources, facing a decline in the sale of jute, periodically subjected to floods and cyclones – East Bengal would be plagued by economic deprivation and political crisis.

“Were the moderate Mujib to come to power, it was questionable whether he could do much to improve the lot of his people. If he did not, the euphoria of independence would possibly disappear within a short time, and there would be an increased interest in and susceptibility to the radical and extremist ideas and groups, which existed in West Bengal.” This would, of course, make Bangladesh a continuing object of concern to India.

A 26 March Defense Intelligence Agency report by U.S. Army Major John Hunt called the crackdown as Yahya’s “misadventure”, with negative consequences for America. “The West’s violent suppression, however, threatens to radicalize the East to the detriment of U.S. interests. The crisis has exhibited anti-American facets from the beginning and both sides will find the United States as a convenient scapegoat,” Hunt predicted.

## Why the Yahya-Mujib Talks Failed: Did Mujib Want to Break Pakistan?

On 14 January 1971, just weeks after the Awami League won a landslide electoral victory, Yahya Khan described Sheikh Mujib as Pakistan's "future prime minister". Less than three months later, he called the Bengali leader a "traitor", describing Mujib's non-cooperation movement to press his demands as nothing less than "an act of treason". After talking with him for ten days to find a solution to the crisis, Yahya left East Pakistan unannounced; then on 26 March, he accused Mujib of attacking Pakistan's solidarity and integrity. He vowed that Mujib's crime would not go unpunished. He disbanded the Awami League and threw Mujib into a dark cell one thousand miles away in the Attock Fort in Abbottabad, West Pakistan.

What went so terribly wrong between Yahya and Mujib? Did Mujib really want to divide Pakistan? Did Yahya truly want a solution or to merely use the opportunity provided by the talks to buy time and prepare for an assault on the Bengalis?

During a meeting with Rogers in New York on 22 October 1970, where he attended the U.N. General Assembly session, Yahya had explained how the political process in Pakistan would evolve after the election. In the "first stage," he said, there would be a coalition government. He would appoint a prime minister and then a president would be elected. When this took place, Yahya would lift martial law. All of this should take about six months, Yahya said.

Yahya remarked that the holding of elections was difficult, but the latter stages would be even more so. If a constitution was not drafted, he said, "I don't know what will happen – perhaps a plebiscite," an allusion to a separation of the two wings. "The biggest mistake made by the previous administration was that it considered the country one unit, which it is not."

Yahya did not have much faith in the parliamentary system, nor did he hold Pakistan's politicians, especially Bhutto in high esteem. He told Nixon in Washington on 25 October 1970, that he had been accused by Bhutto of delaying the elections so that he could deal with India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in New York, where she would be attending the U.N. session, and sell out Pakistan. It was absurd, the general observed, the levels to which political opponents would stoop.

Nixon replied: "I hope you keep a strong presidency as in France."

Yahya said: "Without it Pakistan would disintegrate. Our people like the parliamentary system only because they have been ruled by Britain for so many centuries, but they cannot make it work and they do not have the basic prerequisite, namely a two-party system; we have about thirty-five parties."

Yahya had decided early on against handing over power to Mujib under a constitution based on the Awami League's six-point program. He smelled Pakistan's demise in it. Yahya revealed his fears during a lengthy conversation with the U.S. ambassador on 1 February.

According to a report from the ambassador to the State Department, Yahya "worried aloud about the possibility of a split-up of the two wings". Such an action, Yahya added, was the most disturbing element in the formulation of the constitution.

"He said he had no intention of giving his official sanction to a constitution, which had inherent within it factors which would bring about the dissolution of Pakistan; a united country was a national goal which he cherished," Farland wrote, quoting Yahya.

Paraphrasing his predecessor Ayub Khan's words, Yahya said "he did not intend to preside over the dissolution of Pakistan."

When Farland asked what dangers the general foresaw, Yahya played the China card in an apparent attempt to win America's reassurance that Washington would not support an independent East Bengal. He said the major danger should be obvious to anybody who had read a map or studied military stratagems or knew even a little about the Chinese leadership's aspirations.

A militarily insecure, independent and geographically separated East Pakistan, Yahya explained, would be a highest-priority target for China. Given an independent East Bengal as a starting nucleus, "it would be one of the easiest political moves envisionable for the Chinese to pull into its adjacent areas, specifically West Bengal and Assam"

Bhashani's followers would be grateful for such an opportunity, Yahya said, referring to Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, who led the pro-Chinese National Awami Party, a major political group in East Pakistan.

Yahya highlighted his comments by saying that this would give the "damned Chinese precisely what they've wanted for years – a port on the Bay of Bengal and an outlet to the Indian Ocean". Yahya went on to say that this would also give China an opportunity to outflank all of Southeast Asia in which even Burma would fall "like an over-ripe mango" and Thailand, under increasing pressures, would be looking for means of accommodation. Yahya concluded by saying to the ambassador that "if you think you've had a mess in Vietnam, just think of what will happen if China dominates the whole area."

Farland, too, had observed the opportunities that an independent new nation would afford to China, but he said he was not particularly knowledgeable of Beijing's thinking. Keeping in line with long-held U.S. policy, he assured Yahya that Washington supported Pakistan's territorial integrity.

Yahya said he appreciated the reaffirmation of the U.S. government's policy, because Pakistan at times had heard reports that Washington encouraged the Bengali separation movement, which had been of "concern in high councils." He said "he intended to continue to do everything possible to hold the wings together" because the dangers to West Pakistan as it would then exist, to India and, generally speaking, to Southeast Asia would be acutely magnified.

In the light of his concern of a possible East-West separation, when Yahya rescheduled the National Assembly session on 6 March he issued a warning, especially aimed at the Awami League and its leadership. "Let me make it absolutely clear that no matter what happens, as long as I am in command of the Pakistan armed forces and head of the state, I will ensure complete and absolute integrity of Pakistan. Let there be no mistake on



this point. I have a duty towards millions of people of East and West Pakistan to preserve this country. They expect this from me and I shall not fail them.”

But his warning made no difference in East Pakistan. On 7 March Mujib went ahead with his planned mass rally in Dhaka, which drew an estimated one million people. Surrounded by a sea of people clamoring for their rights, Mujib made his historic speech, telling his fellow Bengalis to prepare for a fight to win independence.

As the crisis reached the boiling point, Yahya arrived in Dhaka on 15 March. He met with Mujib for more than two hours the next day – the first in a series of talks over the next ten days. On 20 March, while continuing talks with Mujib, Yahya ordered Lieutenant General Tikka Khan, commander of the Eastern sector, to begin preparations for a military takeover. On 25 March, after the talks among Yahya, Mujib and Bhutto had collapsed, and Yahya had secretly left Dhaka, Tikka Khan started the military crackdown; the struggle for an independent Bangladesh began.

## Mujib Favors United Pakistan

To justify the military action, Yahya later fabricated a story implicating Mujib with sedition. The White Paper that Pakistan released in August 1971 accused Mujib of conspiring with India to break the country, a charge similar to the one brought against him by Yahya’s predecessor several years earlier but dropped later under growing public pressure. The paper claimed: “It was arranged that on a signal from the Awami League headquarters in Dacca, the armed uprising would begin” in the early hours of 26 March. Only a few hours before the “zero hour,” the paper continued, Yahya ordered the crackdown to prevent the uprising.

In fact, instead of orchestrating an uprising, Mujib was busy in the evening of March 25 giving directives to resume jute exports, which had been disrupted by the political turmoil. When he heard the military had started shooting in the city and hunting down Awami League members, he waited calmly in his house to be arrested.

Mujib, by various accounts at home and abroad, remained committed to Pakistan until 25 March. During a conversation with Kissinger on 7 July 1971, Jagjivan Ram, India’s defense minister, said: “Mujibur Rahman never wanted secession. He was a moderating influence.” Ram said he had known the Bengali leader from Partition days and had been aware of what was going on in East Pakistan.

Mujib’s pre-March messages to the Americans also signaled his opposition to Pakistan’s partition. Daniel Newberry, U.S. charge d’affaires in Dhaka, brought up that point in a report he sent to Washington on 26 February 1974, on Mujib government’s performance. “Whatever his other failings, and they are many, Mujib is a master in the art of ambiguity and Bengali political maneuver. Mujib, we remember, was never a devotee of Bangladesh’s independence, even as late as March 1971,” he recalled in his cable. “Like his mentor, H.S. Suhrawardy, he knew an independent East Bengal would be completely overshadowed by India. The events of 1971 changed the situation and confronted him and his country with the fact of the Indian power. So keen is Mujib’s sense of the immediacy of power that he has consistently pursued a policy of close official friendship with Delhi.”

Three years earlier, on 28 February 1971, when Farland met the Bengali leader he “found that Mujib favored a form of confederation rather than the separation of East Pakistan, but he insisted that ‘his people’ be accorded their rights and not be kept in a ‘colonial status.’”

Mujib’s unwillingness to divide Pakistan explains why he did not prepare a contingency plan to face Yahya’s impending military action. Mujib refused to go underground on 25 March because he abhorred the “politics of guns.” Moreover, he never expected the kind of brutality that Yahya unleashed in East Pakistan. His political experience had taught him that a crackdown, even if it did happen, would be ephemeral, as happened after Ayub’s coup d’etat in 1958 and Yahya’s takeover in 1969. The chain of events in East Pakistan in 1971 closely resembled the pattern in 1969. Everything looked to him exactly as it did two years earlier. The imposition of martial law, ban on political activity and arrests of political leaders as well as shooting protesting students and workers had become staples of Pakistan’s politics. As an activist who had already spent nearly ten years in jail, he reasoned that his political goals would be better served by the martyrdom or further imprisonment. But he obviously did not expect to face a treason charge and possible execution. Only two months earlier, after all, Yahya had described him as “the future prime minister of Pakistan.” Mujib figured that if Yahya used military force, his movement would be set back only temporarily; he would re-emerge triumphant eventually, although he had publicly voiced skepticism that the West Pakistanis would never allow him to rule Pakistan. This line of thinking might have prompted him to advise his West Pakistani colleagues – Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo and Wali Khan, leaders of the leftist National Awami Party – to leave Dhaka, while he himself stayed in his house on the eve of the crackdown. In short, Mujib simply did not want to be recorded in history as the man who broke Pakistan. He, however, did consider the idea in case he failed to reach a deal with the West Pakistanis and approached several foreign envoys to gauge their reaction, including the one from the United States, which opposed secession. America’s eventual opposition to outright secession dampened Mujib’s enthusiasm for a unilateral declaration of independence.

“I do not want to break Pakistan,” Mujib said in an interview with *Time* magazine shortly before the final rupture in March. “But we Bengalis must have autonomy so that we are not treated like a colony of the western wing,” *Time* published the interview on 12 April 1971.

To keep his young militants in line, Mujib spoke of “emancipation” and “freedom.” “But there is no question of secession,” *Time* magazine correspondent David Greenway quoted Mujib as saying in an article 23 August 1971. “We only want our due share. Besides, East Pakistanis are in a majority, and it is ridiculous to think that the majority would secede from the minority.”

Mujib had made a similar commitment to Yahya three months earlier. On 7 January he talked with the general in Dhaka on his six-point plan. After presenting his program, when he asked if Yahya had any objections, the general said he had none, but could Mujib carry the West Pakistani leaders with him? “Of course,” Mujib replied, and then requested that the president convene the parliament on 15 February.

During the same meeting, when East Pakistan Governor Vice Admiral S.M. Ahsan, remarked that the Awami League, with its absolute majority in the national legislature, could ram through its constitution without paying attention to West Pakistan’s interests, Mujib retorted: “No, I am a democrat and the majority leader of all Pakistan. I cannot ignore the interests of West Pakistan. I am not only responsible to the people of East and West Pakistan, but also to the world opinion. I shall do everything on democratic principles.”

On 3 March Mujib told an *Associated Press* correspondent in Dhaka that he was “willing to share power with Bhutto, each to serve as prime minister in his region, to keep Pakistan together,” according to the U.S. Intelligence bulletin, *Indo-Pakistani Crisis: Chronology of Events*. Acting along the line proposed by Mujib, on 14 March Bhutto called for installing an Awami League government in East Pakistan and one or more People’s Party governments in West Pakistan, with the military controlling the central government. Mujib partially accepted Bhutto’s plan during

his talks with Yahya, according to the report.

Another account of Mujib's pledge to Pakistan's unity came from Iqbal F. Quadir, a retired vice admiral who was Pakistan's naval attache in Paris in 1971. A West European diplomat told Quadir that Mujib sent a message to Yahya on 11 March, saying he opposed Pakistan's partition and wanted to discuss possible solutions with the president.

Mujib passed the message through the unnamed diplomat, who was then consul general in Dhaka.. He passed it on to Yahya in the manner Mujib requested. Quadir learned about this in 1978 in Karachi, where the diplomat was then consul general, Quadir wrote in an article in February 2003 in the *Pakistan Defence Journal*.

Vice Admiral S.M. Ahsan, who was East Pakistan's governor until relieved at the end of February 1971, told U.S. envoy Sidney Sober on 16 August during an hour-long talk in Karachi that "prior to March at least, separation from Pakistan was not Mujib's intention". Ahsan earned the respect and confidence of the Awami League and other Bengalis during his tenure, and maintained active dialogue with Mujib while in Dhaka.

He also told the envoy that the "only practical solution to the East Pakistan problem in the long run is political. The alternative is separation of East from West Pakistan and the establishment of an independent state." And, a political solution was "possible only through the rehabilitation and use of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman."

Ahsan believed that Yahya sincerely wanted to restore civilian rule in Pakistan. During Yahya's January visit to East Pakistan, the admiral was convinced that the president fully intended to turn over power to the Awami League, but by February end he had changed his mind. Ahsan speculated that Bhutto was the chief cause of the change in the president's attitude. Awami League leaders were on the whole sincere, relatively conservative middle-class who simply wanted a firm assurance of redress for East Pakistan through maximum autonomy. Ahsan said he had made it quite clear to the president that a delay in calling the assembly would lead to a disaster and even Mujib would find it difficult, if not impossible, to control events. The admiral said there was evidence that by late February the military build-up was beginning and steps were being taken for a forceful imposition of the martial law authority.

He dismissed the pervasive notion that the top military brass pushed Yahya into adopting the hard line."The source of power and voice of authority in Pakistan is President Yahya. He is the first and last authority. Rumors of dynamic generals vying for power beneath him are simply rumors. The mentality of the army in Pakistan is such that subordinates obey and rarely if ever question policy decisions," according to a cable message sent by the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad to the State Department on 17 August 1971.

Ahsan had predicted on 13 February 1970, that "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman seems sure bet to win coming elections in East Pakistan." He made the prediction during a meeting with three U.S. diplomats, including the deputy chief of mission, Sober, and Andrew Kilgore, political officer. They met with the governor in Dhaka in light of allegations that Washington was meddling in East Bengal to separate it from West Pakistan.

Ahsan assured the Americans that "no Pakistan official of authority believed the charges." He advised them against issuing any public denials, which could only draw unnecessary attention to the allegations, raised by Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, president of the pro-Chinese National Awami Party, and Mohammad Toaha, general secretary.

During the meeting, the governor told the Americans that the government "was not overly concerned about Sheikh Mujib's six points". According to a cable sent to the State Department by the U.S. Consulate General in Dhaka on 16 February 1970, "After the elections power balances and relations among various regions would have to be worked out by usual political horse trading. If Mujib were to become prime minister, and that seemed pretty good bet, presumably he would not wish to see a center too weak to maintain control over the country."

Air Marshal Asghar Khan, former chief of Pakistan's air force, painted another picture. He asserted that Mujib had anticipated the crackdown, an assertion corroborated by another West Pakistani politician, Ghaus Baksh Bizenjo, who was present in East Pakistan during the Mujib-Yahya talks and was advised by Mujib on 24 March to leave Dhaka, after the Bengali leader learned about the impending military action.

"I asked Mujib what scenario he visualized and how the stalemate could be broken. He replied that the situation was very clear. Yahya Khan would come to Dhaka first, followed by . . . Bhutto. Yahya would then order military action and that would be the end of Pakistan. About himself, he said, he [Mujib] hoped that he would be taken prisoner, for if he was not, he would be killed either by the Pakistan army or by his own people," Khan wrote in his book, *We've Learnt Nothing from History: Pakistan-Politics and Military Power; narrating a conversation with Mujib in Dhaka in early March*.

Asghar Khan's statements only reinforced the view that Mujib had expected his arrest to be only a passing phase as it had been previously and that he would be even more popular with the Bengalis once he got out the prison. Victory would be ultimately his – and his people's – as the outcome of the election showed. Mujib might have been misled by Yahya's disinformation campaign, too. In the morning of 25 March, when the preparations for the crackdown were in progress, Radio Pakistan reported that Yahya Khan had agreed "in principle" to hand over power to the elected representatives in East Pakistan and had conceded the Awami League's three other demands. Mujib was to meet again with Yahya in the afternoon, but that meeting was canceled.

The final account of Mujib's unwillingness to break Pakistan came from Prince Sadruddin Agha Khan, the U.N. high commissioner for refugees. On 29 November 1971, he told a State Department official that Mujib might not want an independent Bangladesh. "Even today, he wanted a unified Pakistan," Sadruddin told Sisco, adding that his view was based on his long meetings with A.K. Brohi, Mujib's defense counsel in the sedition trial in 1971. Mujib, true to his pledge to the Bengalis, wanted their emancipation based on his six-point program, which envisaged East Pakistan's maximum autonomy in a confederal Pakistan, but not an independent Bangladesh.

The events in Dhaka during the fateful days of March 1971 surprised not only Mujib, but also many Americans, including Kissinger, who were unclear why the talks had collapsed. The Americans thought Mujib and Yahya had reached a tentative deal, providing for an immediate establishment of provincial governments, temporary continuation of the central government under Yahya and the drafting of a constitution. The new constitution would outline the division of power between the central government and the provinces, with the central government keeping control only of defense, foreign affairs, and currency.

"I have no idea what caused the breakdown in talks. I was as much surprised as anyone else," Kissinger told the Washington Special Action Group, a panel that implemented the Nixon administration's foreign policy. The group met on 26 March to discuss the East Pakistan situation. Kissinger said he thought an agreement between Mujib and Yahya was in sight.

CIA chief Helms said an agreement appeared imminent on 24 March, but the talks eventually fell apart possibly because Mujib had demanded an immediate lifting of martial law – a step that would have ended Yahya's grip on power.

Van Hollen offered a different explanation: "One possible reason was that Yahya was unable to sell the settlement in West Pakistan."

## Yahya Backtracks After Mujib Victory

A version of what caused the breakdown came from Council Muslim League President Muntaz Daultana. On 29 March, three days after the military started Operation Searchlight in Dhaka, Hobart Luppi, the U.S. consul general in Karachi, spoke with Daultana at his residence. Daultana, who was in East Pakistan during Yahya's visit, spoke at length about the Mujib-Yahya talks.

He said Mujib's demands were much as those Yahya had spelled out in his address to the nation on 29 March, except that Yahya had not detailed Mujib's views on an interim central government. Mujib had wanted Yahya to remain as president with no political government at the central level. Mujib was not "particularly concerned" about the six points. He was willing to accept an interim arrangement based on the 1962 constitution. However, he envisioned that the president would allow the Awami League to exercise full control over East Pakistan affairs, while Yahya would coordinate inter-provincial affairs of the West wing.

On the "two-assembly" proposal, Mujib had been rather vague whether he envisaged two separate assemblies or two subcommittees of the National Assembly. Daultana pressed Mujib to let the full assembly meet to sanction the interim arrangements, but Mujib refused. He said his supporters would not tolerate his sitting in the same room with Bhutto.

Daultana also tried to persuade Mujib to let the leaders of the small parties work on a solution that would put Mujib in power at the center. Mujib said they could try, but he was convinced the West Pakistani establishment – as represented by Yahya and Bhutto – would never permit the Bengalis to rule Pakistan.

Mujib was also infuriated by the president's choice of advisers for the negotiations in Dhaka – Justice A.R. Cornelius, Yahya's law minister, General S.G.M.M. Pirzada, Yahya's chief of staff, and M.M. Ahmed, Yahya's economic adviser, whom Mujib considered a representative of the anti-Bengali establishment of West Pakistan.

In a conversation alone with Mujib, Daultana had asked him if he genuinely wanted Pakistan to remain one. He told Mujib that some forty MNAs-elect in West Pakistan were prepared to work with the Bengali leader towards a constitutional settlement that would permit the Awami League majority to take power at the center and to enjoy maximum provincial autonomy in the East wing. If, however, Mujib was working towards separation, Daultana and his friends needed to know so that they could work to prevent a bloody rupture. Mujib replied that while he was under great pressure to declare an independent Bangladesh, he wanted to maintain Pakistan. Daultana accepted Mujib's response as sincere.

Daultana concluded from his conversations with Mujib in Dhaka that the Awami League leader was unshakably persuaded that the West Pakistanis would never permit a Bengali to assume power through democratic means. He was convinced that the recent moves by Yahya and Bhutto, such as the postponement of the National Assembly, were additional steps in a historical process of conspiracy against the Bengalis.

As a result of these suspicions, Mujib's goal in the negotiations with Yahya appeared to be the achievement of *de jure* control in East Pakistan under an interim arrangement. If he achieved this, Mujib believed he could then negotiate on an equal basis with West Pakistan over permanent constitutional arrangements. Daultana surmised that Mujib would ultimately have sought a confederal arrangement.

Daultana's account indicated that Yahya had reassessed his position after Mujib's election victory. There are two possible explanations as to why Mujib agreed to keep Yahya as president. He probably wanted to entice Yahya to hand over power peacefully, or else Yahya himself had bargained for it.

Yahya's contacts with Mujib went back at least to 1969 when the Bengalis revolted against the military strongman Ayub Khan. Although Ayub gave the appearance of relinquishing power on his own, recent accounts show he was, in fact, toppled by Yahya. One such account came from Brigadier Abdul Rehman Siddiqi, head of the Inter Services public relations and press adviser to Yahya Khan.

In February 1969 when Ayub Khan faced street agitation and sought to negotiate his way out by hosting a Round table Conference, Yahya started plotting against his superior. He secretly met Mujib and encouraged him to press on his demands, a tactic that Altaf Gauhar, Ayub's powerful information secretary, later espoused as an effective way to stage a military coup d'état. Yahya went as far as to tell Mujib that "he could go ahead with his anti-Ayub campaign without any let or hindrance from the army."

Siddiqi narrated this tale in a book, *East Pakistan: The Endgame – An Onlooker's Journal 1969-1971*, based on his diaries and other sources he had cultivated as the army's chief public relations official.

General Ghulam Umar, Yahya's political assistant, ordered Siddiqi one week before the conference to secretly prepare an advance draft of Yahya's address to the nation as the chief martial law administrator. Two days after that order, Yahya flatly refused Ayub's direct request for the army to come to the government's rescue. Yahya made it clear that it was either complete martial law under his own control, or nothing. Ayub knew then that his days were numbered. Following his refusal to help Ayub quell the violent civic unrest, Yahya cunningly enlisted the support of his old friend and drinking buddy, Interior Minister Admiral A.R. Khan, who persisted in presenting highly pessimistic daily briefs to further undermine Ayub. When Siddiqi confronted Pirzada, Yahya's chief of staff, with these peculiar goings-on, the general politely told him to keep his silence. Within a month, Ayub left the scene, allowing Yahya to enter the scene through the back door.

The process of Ayub's fall started after the politicians failed to reach an agreement with him at the conference. After his failed attempt to find a way to bring the unrest under control, he called the army commanders to devise a plan to quell the unrest. Ayub first approached Yahya in late February 1971 when he told him that he might need the army's help to restore public order. In mid-March, he asked Yahya to come to the aid of the civilian administration. Yahya told Ayub the military could not impose martial law in only selected cities where political disturbances were intense, because the politicians could easily move into areas not under martial law and continue fomenting trouble for the government. He argued that martial law must be imposed all over the country to be effective. In addition, he told Ayub, if he wanted to quietly leave, he must put Abdul Jabbar Khan, speaker of the Pakistan National Assembly, in power because he was in line according to the constitution. If he wanted to give power to the military, he must abrogate the constitution.

Ayub, who had recently suffered a heart attack, felt disturbed by Yahya's suggestion to abrogate the constitution. According to *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh*, by Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, he had said: "My God, it's impossible. It's my creation, my legacy. It has my blood in it." Yahya then suggested that Ayub resume talks with the politicians and work out solutions. "The politicians are all swine and won't listen to me," a frustrated Ayub fumed. In the evening of 25 March 1969, as field marshal, Ayub ordered the

military to impose martial law and assume power.

The American intelligence community, which had inaccurately predicted Ayub would survive the political turmoil, was unsure exactly how the power transfer had occurred. On 25 March, when Kissinger briefed Nixon about Ayub's departure, he commented: "The possibility that the army moved at its own initiative and forced Ayub's resignation cannot be excluded, but initially, at least, it appears more likely that the move was mutually agreed upon."

Yahya made it look like Ayub had handed over power on his own. In a letter to Nixon on 27 May 1969, the general wrote: "On March 24th President Mohammad Ayub Khan addressed to me a letter, explaining that since the civil administration and constitutional authority in Pakistan had become ineffective, he had no option but to step aside and let the defense forces of Pakistan, as [the] only remaining effective and legal instrument, to take over full control of the country's affairs. On March 25th, he announced his decision to relinquish office of the president of Pakistan and called upon me, as the commander-in-chief of the Pakistan army, to fulfill my constitutional responsibilities to defend the country not only against external aggression but also to save it from internal disorder and chaos."

After the takeover, Yahya revealed his true intentions and confided to some of his senior officers: "Gentlemen, we must be prepared to rule this unfortunate country for the next 14 years or so," Siddiqi claimed. Soon, Yahya announced general elections after the intelligence agencies convinced him that they would result in a split vote and a factious National Assembly, making it impossible for the victorious party to fulfill the stipulation of an approved constitution within 120 days as Yahya had mandated. Such a failure would then lead to fresh elections, while power would remain indefinitely in the army's firm grip.

However, the election results could not have been farther from Yahya's calculations. Badly let down by the intelligence agencies, Yahya decided to pursue a new course of action. His famous reference to Mujib as the future prime minister was in reality no more than "a calculated maneuver aimed, at first, to set the military against Mujib, and, second, to provoke the Pakistan Peoples Party," Siddiqi asserted.

The worried generals then recruited Bhutto to ensure that any chance of a compromise with Mujib would be nonexistent. In fact, Umar even met many West Pakistani minority party leaders to dissuade them from attending the first National Assembly session in Dhaka. And, when Mujib began his non-cooperation movement in response, the army-controlled West Pakistani media retaliated by accusing the Bengalis of treason.

Mujib apparently was aware of what the military was up to. According to Ghulam Mustafa Khar, Punjab's former chief minister, Mujib feared the army would kill him. Mujib once asked him to tell Bhutto that the army would kill him first and then murder the People's Party leader. Khar said Mujib opposed Pakistan's bifurcation, but some leftist Awami League elements forced him to support Pakistan's division. Mujib only wanted "true autonomy" for East Pakistan, Khar said.

The Pakistan War Inquiry Commission appointed by Bhutto in December 1971 to examine the setback in East Pakistan held the top generals responsible for the East Pakistan mess up. It recommended that Yahya Khan, General Hamid Khan, chief of staff of the Pakistan army and deputy chief martial law administrator, Lieutenant General S.G.M.M. Pirzada, Lieutenant General Gul Hassan Khan, chief of the general staff who was later appointed army chief by Bhutto, Major General Ghulam Umar and Major General Osman Mitha, be publicly tried. Tikka Khan, Rao Farman Ali and Major General Khadim Hussain Raja, commander of the Infantry Division, were associated with the planning of the military action, according to the Pakistan war commission report. They "were present in Dacca along with Yahya Khan, and secretly departed there on the evening of that fateful day after fixing the deadline for the military action," the commission said. They created a situation in East Pakistan that led to a civil disobedience movement, armed revolt by the Awami League and the subsequent surrender of the Pakistani troops and Pakistan's partition. But the Pakistan government took no action against them.

To the Pakistanis, the report's fate remained a mystery; neither Bhutto nor his successor published it. "When Justice Hamoodur Rahman in his official inquiry recorded the truth of 1971, Bhutto as prime minister personally ordered that each and every copy of the report be burnt," wrote political analyst Jamaluddin Naqvi in *The Dawn*, a Pakistani newspaper. Parts of the report were leaked and published in the Indian magazine *India Today* in August 2000.

Why did Bhutto suppress the report? An authoritative explanation has yet to emerge. One possible explanation was the fear of reprisal by the Pakistani military. Bhutto, who had little military support, dared not face the all-powerful Pakistan armed forces. If the report were published, Bhutto would possibly have faced public clamor to put the generals on trial. But he was under threat from Washington not to put Yahya on trial. In a personal message Nixon had told Bhutto "that he should treat Yahya well in retirement and we would not look favorably on any retribution," according to Kissinger, who disclosed it in February 1972 to the Chinese premier Chou En-lai during Nixon's trip to China.

Chou En-lai commented that Bhutto had assured him "he was taking good care of him and protecting him, and if he did not do so, some other generals would want to take care of him [Yahya] differently."

"Both of us owe something to Yahya, although he didn't show much statesmanship in leading his country, for bringing the link between our two countries," Chou En-lai told Nixon and Kissinger in March 1972. "We should not forget and we cannot forget, especially that Dr. Kissinger was able through him to come secretly for talks here. And, when a man makes a contribution to the world, we should remember him."

Yahya really did not lead his troops in East Pakistan well, the Chinese leader said. At the time of the surrender, Pakistan still had 80,000 troops in East Pakistan. "It was not a situation in which they couldn't keep fighting. We know the Pakistanis are good fighters, and the men wanted to keep on. The trouble was the commanders were terrible – they really just scattered the troops."

Yahya should have concentrated his troops to win a victory, and once the Indian side had suffered a defeat they would have stopped because West Bengal was not very secure either, Chou En-lai observed. The Indians had eight divisions at first, but these were also scattered. They had three divisions in the western part of East Bengal; the northwestern part had two divisions; and in the eastern part they also had two divisions.

They also had two other divisions on the McMahon line, which they did not move. They only took one division from the McMahon line down to East Pakistan. In Sikkim, the Indians originally had three divisions, from which they took one division over to eight in East Pakistan and left two divisions facing China.

"If at that time the Pakistanis had concentrated a force of 40,000 against one Indian division, they would have been able to win and that would have demoralized the Indians. So at that time even our vice foreign minister still believed they could win the war. Bhutto, too. They are both men of letters; not soldiers. But we didn't believe this. We said that if they fought, they would sacrifice everything."

Yahya was probably a good man with good intentions, according to Chou, "but he didn't know how to lead an army, how to fight." This was why the younger generals in the Pakistani army were dissatisfied with Yahya, he added.

Bhutto himself revealed how weak his position was with the military, during a conversation with Farland after he had succeeded Yahya as president. According to Farland, Bhutto had requested two military helicopters “presumably to provide logistical support for his stay in Murree,” but the army rebuffed him. General Tikka Khan, who was hand-picked by Bhutto as the army chief, told Bhutto it was nothing personal against him, but the army needed the choppers for its own use.

“Bhutto implied that he was not altogether comfortable in his relationship with the military leadership. He recalled having gotten rid of Air Marshal Rahim and General Hasan [former air force and army chief, respectively], but said that the potential for trouble remained. He stated he simply could not afford at this stage to ignore the military,” Farland told the State Department in a cable.

Bhutto dismissed the military chiefs on 3 March 1972, after they had refused orders to suppress a major police strike. The generals, despite their hidden dislike for Bhutto, could do little to oppose him, especially after the East Pakistan setback. Bhutto’s apparent inclination to write off Kashmir, much as he did East Pakistan, by negotiating the Simla Accord with India in 1972, was more than the army was prepared to tolerate. In the immediate aftermath of the 1971 war, the army could only stand in the sidelines as Bhutto consolidated his power, sought diplomatic arrangements with New Delhi, and managed the release of the 93,000 prisoners of war languishing in India.

General Gul Hassan, whom Bhutto appointed army chief in December 1971 but later banished to Greece as Pakistan’s ambassador, held Bhutto responsible for breaking Pakistan. “Soon after assuming office in 1971, it transpired that you were the chief architect in the dismemberment of the country,” Hassan wrote when he resigned as ambassador on 17 April 1977, protesting Bhutto’s political moves, which he said would destroy his country and “leave 70 million of our people with no homeland.”

Bhutto picked General Tikka Khan, known as the butcher of East Pakistan for his role in the massacre in Dhaka, to replace Hassan, hoping he would not interfere in politics. Bhutto told Oriana Fallaci, an Italian journalist, in April 1972, that he had appointed Tikka army chief to prevent a possible putsch. In fact, Bhutto had defended Tikka Khan’s action in East Pakistan, saying he merely followed orders as a good soldier should. Bhutto dropped all the blame for Pakistan’s setback at the footsteps of Yahya, whom he put under house arrest after taking over from him on 20 December 1971, with the support of the junior generals. Yahya was released after General Ziaul Haq overthrew Bhutto in July 1977.

Bhutto had promised to put Yahya on trial if the war commission so recommended. “The defeat we suffered is his – Mrs. Gandhi can rightly boast of having won a war, but if she won it, she should first of all thank Yahya Khan and his gang of illiterate psychopaths. Even to get him to reason was an impossible task – it only made you lose your temper,” Bhutto told the journalist Fallaci.

Bhutto apparently had developed a personal hatred for Yahya. He described to Fallaci how Yahya mistreated him soon after he had ordered the crackdown in East Pakistan.

“In April, after that fine business in Dacca, he sent for me. He looked satisfied, sure of himself, by now convinced he had the situation in hand. He offered me a drink. ‘Well, you politicians are really finished,’ he said. Then he said that not only Mujib but I too was considered an agitator. I too was preaching against the unity of Pakistan. ‘I’m always under pressure to arrest you, Bhutto.’ I got so angry I lost all control. I answered that I would not let myself be intimidated by him, that his methods had led us to disaster. I threw away the glass of whiskey and left the room. There I was stopped by General Pirzada, who took me by the arm, ‘No, come on, calm down, have a seat, go back in. I calmed down and went back. I tried to explain to him that there was a great difference between me and Mujib: He was a secessionist and I wasn’t. A useless task. Instead of listening to me, he went on drinking, drinking. Then he got nasty.’”

Yahya, who remained mostly silent until his death in 1980, refused to accept the responsibility for the East Pakistan debacle and put the blame squarely on Bhutto. He made a fifty-seven-page affidavit before his death through Lahore High Court lawyer Manzur Ahmed Rana to do what he described as setting the record straight for the future generations. Yahya scrutinized each typed page in May 1978 at his house in Rawalpindi, made a few corrections, and then signed the document, declaring it to be all true. The affidavit, made publicly available in 2005, said:

“It was Bhutto, not Mujib, who broke Pakistan. Bhutto’s stance in 1971 and his stubbornness harmed Pakistan’s solidarity much more than Sheikh Mujib’s six-point demand. It was his high ambitions and rigid stance that led to rebellion in East Pakistan. He riled up the Bengalis and brought an end to Pakistan’s solidarity. East Pakistan broke away.”

Yahya, however, never explained how Bhutto, who was not in power before the crackdown, could be blamed for the setback. Yahya’s claim implied he was conceding that he made a big mistake when he listened to Bhutto and decided not to hand over power to Mujib; it was perhaps a general’s vain attempt to absolve himself of the responsibility of his own action.

He termed Mujib a patriot, but said that some leftists in the Awami League instigated him – a theory that got currency in West Pakistan, although it is hardly conceivable that given Mujib’s towering personality, his resolve could have been shaken by a minority in his party. By calling Mujib a patriot in his journal, Yahya contradicted himself, too. On 19 August 1971, when Farland asked if he would hang Mujib, Yahya said: “I am not going to execute the man, even though he is a traitor,” according to a cable the ambassador sent to the State Department.

Contradicting Bhutto’s claim that Tikka Khan merely carried out the orders of the high command, Yahya denied he ever ordered Mujib’s arrest. He said Tikka issued the order to capture Mujib dead or alive, a claim hard to accept at its face value, because the Pakistani army hierarchy was unlikely to permit a provincial governor or a regional commander to act on his own on such a major issue. If Tikka had really acted on his own against the high command’s wishes, he could have been disciplined after his return from East Pakistan in April 1971; it never happened. According to Z.A. Khan, a Pakistani retired brigadier who led the team that arrested Mujib, General Abdul Hamid Khan, the chief of staff who was among the top generals who persuaded Yahya to harshly treat the Bengalis, himself approved the arrest and ordered him to capture Mujib alive.

According to Yahya, Mujib was prepared to change his six-point demand, if necessary – an assertion supported by Mumtaz Daultana, who made a similar comment to the U.S. consul general in Karachi three days after the 26 March crackdown. Yahya claimed that in the end he wanted to leave power in the hands of the Awami League, a decision he probably made after realising that India would defeat Pakistan in the ensuing war. In fact, he did tell Farland through Sultan Khan, Pakistan’s foreign secretary, that he had authorized Bhutto to introduce a U.N. resolution for a compromise with the Awami League within the framework of one Pakistan. Yahya confirmed it to the U.S. ambassador when Kissinger wanted to verify the resolution Bhutto had introduced in the Security Council two days before the surrender in Dhaka.

## **Bhutto’s Version: “My Country Is Finished”**

Bhutto gave an account of what happened in Dhaka in an interview with Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci in 1972. In mid-March 1971, according to

Bhutto, Yahya told him about his upcoming trip to Dhaka and asked if Bhutto wanted to go, too. Bhutto replied that he would, if Mujib was willing to talk to him. After Yahya began talks with Mujib, he sent a telegram from Dhaka to tell Bhutto that Mujib would talk with him. Bhutto came to Dhaka on 19 March and met Mujib the next day together with Yahya. "Mujib was all sweetness and light with Yahya," recounted Bhutto, but not to him.

"I've come to reach an agreement with you, Mr. President, and I want nothing to do with Mr. Bhutto. I'll tell the press that I have met with the president and that Mr. Bhutto was there by chance," Bhutto quoted Mujib as saying. Yahya responded: "No, no, Mujib. You must speak for yourself."

Mujib then noted that so many people died in the hurricane in 1970 in East Pakistan, but no West Pakistani politician bothered to show up, a snub that was an indirect jab at Bhutto. It ticked him off.

"How was I responsible for the hurricane? Had I been the one to send the hurricane?" Bhutto vented. Mujib's answer was to get up and say that he had to leave to go to a funeral.

Bhutto got up, too, to escort him to the ante room. But Mujib did not want him to. Three people were present in the ante room: Yahya's aide-de-camp; his military secretary; and his political aide, General Ghulam Umar. According to Bhutto, Mujib began screaming, "Go away, everybody go away! I have to talk to Mr. Bhutto!" After the three had left, he sat down and then told Bhutto: "Brother, brother! We must come to an agreement, brother! For the love of God, I implore you!"

"Astonished, I took him outside so no one would hear him. Outside, and in a particularly excited tone, he declared that I must take West Pakistan for myself, he East Pakistan, and that he had set up everything for a secret meeting. After dark, he would send for me. I told him I didn't like this business. I hadn't come to Dacca to meet him like a thief under a banana tree and in the dark. I didn't intend to dismember Pakistan, and if he wanted secession, he had only to propose it to the assembly, counting on his absolute majority. But it was like talking to a wall. I had to accept the compromise of resuming talks through our spokesmen. Which is what happened without leading to anything, of course. In those days, he was more deranged than ever – he lost his head over nothing. And, so we arrived at the twenty-fifth," Bhutto elaborated.

"You didn't notice anything suspicious on March 25?" Fallaci asked Bhutto during their interview.

Bhutto replied that he "felt certain uneasiness, a strange sensation, which had come to a head. Every evening I went to Yahya to report that Mujib and I weren't making any progress, and Yahya showed no interest. He looked away or complained about the television or grumbled because he couldn't listen to his favorite songs – his records hadn't arrived from Rawalpindi. Then the morning of the twenty-fifth he said something that left me disconcerted: 'There's no need to meet Mujib today. We'll see him tomorrow, you and I.' At 8 p.m., he reported 'everything to Mujib's envoy,' who exclaimed, 'that son of a bitch has already left,' " Bhutto said.

Bhutto did not believe Yahya had already left Dhaka. "I telephoned the presidential residence and asked to speak with Yahya. They told me he couldn't be disturbed; he was at supper with General Tikka Khan, who was appointed East Pakistan's governor on 9 March. I telephoned Tikka Khan. They told me he couldn't be disturbed; he was at supper with Yahya Khan. Only then did I begin to worry, and suspecting a trick, I went to supper, then to sleep. I was awakened by gunfire and by friends running in from other rooms. I ran to the window, and as God is my witness, I wept. I wept and said, 'My country is finished.'"

Bhutto said he learned about Mujib's arrest at 8 a.m. of 26 March. "How did I take it? I was glad he was alive, and I thought they might have maltreated him a little. Then I thought that his arrest might help to reach a compromise. They wouldn't keep him in prison more than a month or two, and, in the meantime, we'd be able to bring back law and order."

Although Bhutto did not admit to having any advance knowledge of the military crackdown, he did endorse it. Upon his return from Dhaka, Bhutto commented on the military action in East Pakistan while talking to an *Associated Press of Pakistan* reporter, I.A. Khan, in Karachi "Thank God, Pakistan has been saved."

Fallaci asked, "Did you really mean to say that this massacre was morally justified?" And Bhutto said: "Every government, every country, has the right to exercise force when necessary. For instance, in the name of unity. You can't build without destroying. To build a country, Stalin was obliged to use force and kill. Mao Tse-tung was obliged to use force and kill. To mention only two recent cases, without raking over the whole history of the world. Yes, there are circumstances where a bloody suppression is justifiable and justified. In March, the unity of Pakistan depended on the suppression of the secessionists. But to carry it out with such brutality on the people instead of on those responsible wasn't necessary. That's not the way to convince poor people who've been told that with the Six Points there'll be no more hurricanes, no more floods, no more hunger. I spoke out against such methods more emphatically than anyone else, and when no one dared do so."

## **Bizenjo's Account: "The General Had Spoken"**

Yet another account of the Mujib-Yahya talks came from the former governor of Baluchistan, Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, who was elected to the Pakistan National Assembly [parliament] in 1970 on a National Awami Party ticket from West Pakistan.

As the situation deteriorated with each passing day in March 1971, Yahya Khan expressed his intention to meet with Sheikh Mujib to discuss matters, but Mujib was reluctant. Some of Bizenjo's friends and colleagues in Karachi, who had been watching the unfolding events with deep concern, asked him to go to Dhaka to try to persuade Mujib to meet with Yahya and have a frank and forthright talk on the situation.

East Pakistan was then heading towards the point beyond redemption. Mujib was not expressly opposed to negotiations, but the irony of the situation consisted in an amalgam of several crisscrossing factors. Punjab's traditional power elite had already decided to call it quits and get rid of the Bengalis rather than let them assume power by virtue of their majority in the National Assembly.

Bizenjo recounted an example of the cynicism that marked the West Pakistani rulers' mindset. He went to see Yahya Khan in 1970 to discuss certain points relating to the holding of elections in Baluchistan based on the one-man-one-vote principle. During the conversation, when the East Pakistan issue came up, the general said: "Sooner or later, East Pakistan will have to be amputated. And, if at all that is to happen, why let them suck our blood for two or three more years?"

Bizenjo was appalled.

"I was shocked to hear these words coming from the mouth of the president of Pakistan," he wrote in his autobiography, *In Search of*

*Solutions.* “Who was sucking whose blood, the whole world knew, but not Yahya Khan and his ilk in the ruling junta and their handful of cohorts in East Pakistan.”

Because of Yahya Khan’s alarming remarks the previous year, Bizenjo was reluctant to visit Dhaka. He told his friends and colleagues that Mujib was the most popular national hero of Bengal. “If you can think of a way I can establish contact with him, then I may take the chance of going to Dhaka.”

Muazzam Ali, who owned the Pakistan Press International news agency, was among those who wanted Bizenjo to go to Dhaka. He said he could send a message across to Dhaka using one of his telex machines that was still working. Bizenjo requested him to send a telex message to Mujib “that if he deemed it useful, I would like to meet him” in Dhaka. The next day, Muazzam Ali brought Mujib’s reply that he would be pleased if Bizenjo could come to Dhaka and also stayed with him. When Bizenjo was at the Karachi airport to depart for Dhaka, his party chief Wali Khan arrived unexpectedly from London. Everybody pressed him to go to Dhaka with Bizenjo. Wali Khan instantly agreed.

Bizenjo and Wali Khan came to Dhaka on 13 March. From the airport they went straight to the residence of their “all-time hosts and party comrades” Ahmadul and Laila Kabir, owners of the *Daily Sangbad* newspaper. From there, they rang up Sheikh Mujib, who was very glad to hear that Wali Khan came along with Bizenjo. “He sounded calm and composed as he said plaintively: ‘You both should have stayed with me. You are my guests. And, you did not even intimate to me your arrival schedule.’ My reply was: ‘Ahmadul Kabir’s is also not a stranger’s house. He is your friend, too.’”

They met with Mujib the next day. Mujib welcomed the two with great warmth and affection. As soon as they sat down, Bizenjo went straight to the purpose of their visit and told Mujib: “We expect that you will frankly tell us about your plans, because we are among those in West Pakistan who strongly support your political stand. You have won the elections and power should be transferred to you. If you choose to make a unilateral declaration of independence, you can imagine the enormity of the problems we will have to face.”

On hearing this, Mujib “became very emotional. Tears welled up in his eyes.” He asked: “Who is telling whom not to break up Pakistan? You, who were associated with the Congress, [alluding to our pre-Independence association with the Indian National Congress] telling me, who was a hardcore Muslim Leaguer and rendered sacrifices for the creation of Pakistan? What an irony!”

Wali Khan intervened and reminded Mujib: “We were then pleading with you not to break India and create Pakistan, but you said you would not rest until you created Pakistan, and you did create it. Now with folded hands we are begging you, please don’t break Pakistan, but you say you will break Pakistan. You Muslim Leaguers, past and present varieties, are a special kind of species.”

They tried to drive the point home that he must meet with Yahya Khan and find a way out to ensure the transfer of power to him. The men at the helm were utterly incapable of handling the crisis. Sheikh Mujib replied: “I want to tell you that they [Yahya and his associates] will not transfer power to me, even if that meant the breakup of Pakistan. Punjab will not allow me to come to power. I will try but on one condition. You both will remain in Dhaka as long as the talks lasted. One thing more. Now when you leave my house, I will come out with you but will not declare publicly that I am going to meet Yahya Khan.”

When he came out into the courtyard, he found a big crowd of local and foreign correspondents waiting outside. Thousands of people were present, raising slogans of “Joi Bangla!” After surveying the scene, Mujib announced to the journalists that he would meet Yahya Khan. Everyone present listened in disbelief. When an American correspondent asked him whether he would meet Yahya Khan only if the general came to his residence as Bhutto did, Mujib’s reply was most sensible and politically correct: “Yahya Khan is the president of the country. I will meet him wherever he suggests.”

On 15 March, Yahya Khan arrived in Dhaka. He invited Wali Khan and Bizenjo to meet him at the Government House. They told Yahya that Sheikh Mujib was not thinking of anything like secession. His contention was that his party had won a majority of the National Assembly seats and democratic norms demanded that power be transferred to him. Yahya Khan asked Bizenjo and Wali Khan to remain in Dhaka while the talks continued.

The Yahya-Mujib talks began on 16 March. Mujib kept them abreast of the proceedings every day. In the first few days, the talks seemed to proceed rather smoothly. Later on, Yahya Khan invited all the West Pakistani political leaders to Dhaka. He also summoned his economic adviser M.M. Ahmed. When Mujib learned this, he expressed his fears that the negotiations would stall, because Bhutto and M.M. Ahmed, whom Mujib considered a hardcore anti-Bengali, would sabotage the talks.

Upon arrival in Dhaka, Bhutto sent his party’s delegation to meet Wali Khan and Bizenjo. Bhutto asked the West Pakistanis to evolve a common position, but Wali Khan and Bizenjo rejected his suggestion.

Talks with Yahya then proceeded on a new trajectory. Initially, he said he could transfer power if the conditions of Legal Framework Order were met. Mujib suggested that two assemblies – one consisting of members elected from West Pakistan and the other from East Pakistan – be convened and asked to prepare their separate draft constitutions, followed by a joint session of the two to draft a federal constitution. Yahya insisted on convening one assembly. Bizenjo proposed to Yahya: “Let us not create the impression that we are two separate countries whose assemblies are meeting separately to draft separate constitutions. Let there be five assemblies or better call them five Constitutional Committees [one for each province] to prepare five different draft constitutions. These constitutional committees should then meet in a joint session of the National Assembly to frame the country’s federal constitution.”

Yahya showed a slight inclination towards the suggestion. However, when Wali Khan and Bizenjo met Mujib separately that night, “he told them that the general’s mood was shifting fast and becoming unpredictable.” He said: “I shall no longer ask for convening of one assembly or two assemblies. I shall demand immediate transfer of power and lifting of martial law. I shall convene the National Assembly as the leader of the majority party. The core issue is the lifting of martial law and transfer of power to my party.

“We conveyed to Yahya Khan Sheikh Mujib’s demand to lift martial law and hand over power to him. When we cautioned Yahya that it was not advisable to invite the disintegration of Pakistan by sticking to technicalities, he shot back: ‘If your friend Mujib doesn’t behave, my army knows how to shoot their way through’. The general had spoken. It was not difficult to read what was going on in his mind. Turning to him, I asked: ‘Mr. President, do you really think that the solution to this delicate issue is the military solution, solving it through military force?’ His reply, strangely enough, was, ‘No!’”

When the two met Mujib on March 24, he broke the alarming news, saying: “Now it is better that you both leave Dhaka. The army has decided to move against us in the next two days. Your presence here will serve no useful purpose.” Stunned and speechless, they left Sheikh Mujib’s



house.

Yahya called all the West Pakistani National Assembly members to the Government House that night. Bizenjo deliberately did not go. Instead, he went to meet Comrade Moni Singh of the Communist Party to say goodbye.

When he returned to the Kabirs' house, Laila was waiting anxiously. She informed Bizenjo that there had been several phone calls for him from the Government House. As they were talking, Wali Khan returned from the Government House. The general had told him that their presence in Dhaka would no longer be necessary. He invited Wali Khan and Bizenjo to travel with him on his flight back to Karachi. Wali Khan thanked the general and declined. He sought Yahya's help to buy two tickets to Karachi, because there was no one in Dhaka to issue Pakistan International tickets. The next day they got their tickets and flew back to Karachi. That was 25 March 1971.

## Yahya's Explanation: Mujib Wants Secession

On 31 March Pakistan's ambassador to Washington, Agha Hilaly, delivered a letter from Yahya to U.S. President Nixon, explaining the rationale behind his decision to launch a crackdown on 25 March. Yahya had hoped his discussions in Dhaka would lead to a broad political agreement regarding the convention of the National Assembly and framing of a constitution.

"Unfortunately, however, the political leadership in East Pakistan and, especially Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, took a progressively rigid stand, which made such an agreement impossible. Meanwhile, murder, arson and widespread disorder in defiance of the governmental authority were let loose in the province," Yahya wrote. "In the larger interest of the country, I exercised utmost restraint and patience and tried to evolve a generally acceptable formula to resolve constitutional difficulties. In pursuit of the same objective, I went personally to East Pakistan to hold consultations with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Even while I was there, the Awami League leaders continued to make statements and to indulge in practices which clearly showed that they were not prepared for pursuing a compromise. The last round of talks in Dacca left me in no doubt that they had no intention of accepting any constitutional formula, which would ensure integrity and unity of the country. Eventually, a point was reached where the Awami League put forward final proposals, which virtually amounted to dismemberment of the country. Since they had no such mandate from the people and as unity of the country was at stake, firm action had to be taken to assert the government's authority and to safeguard the integrity of Pakistan. There was no option but to take that decision."

On 10 May, Yahya sent his economic adviser, M.M. Ahmad, to Washington to explain what prompted him to take the military action. Ahmad told the Americans that Yahya felt disappointed with Mujib for shifting his ground after the election. Mujib was to have come to Islamabad for meetings early in the constitutional process, instead Yahya had to go to Dhaka. Again, when the second round of talks was arranged, Mujib found an excuse not to come. Yahya had expected some understanding among the politicians before the constituent assembly actually met. The problem was that the main political parties were regional in character; they did not prioritize the national interest. When Yahya failed to arrange a round of discussions, he found it necessary to postpone the assembly session.

America did not entirely buy Yahya's story. Van Hollen, deputy assistant secretary of state, told a meeting on 26 March that Bhutto "forced Yahya to postpone the constituent assembly."

The postponement had provoked a sharp reaction in East Pakistan, even though Yahya announced a fresh date within six days. Yahya had gone to Dhaka on 15 March. The Awami League put forward its six demands, adding four more. The new demands amounted to lifting the martial law before the constituent assembly and transferring power to a civilian government. Some progress had been made in the talks, and Yahya asked other political leaders to come over from West Pakistan. Ahmad himself joined them for talks on the economic issues. Despite some differences, a general agreement seemed possible. Yahya offered to solve the impasse along any of the three following lines:

1. There could be a proclamation embodying an interim constitution, including most of the six points. Yahya wanted the constituent assembly to meet first to approve the constitution, but the Awami League wanted the martial law to be lifted first.
2. If the constituent assembly could not meet first, there could be a proclamation putting forward the interim constitution but not lifting martial law.
3. A third possibility would have been an announcement that such an interim constitution would date from the day that the constituent assembly adopted it.

The West Pakistani leaders wanted the constituent assembly to meet and then break into two houses. The Awami League wanted the assembly to meet as two houses right from the start, Ahmad explained to Kissinger.

When Kissinger asked him to outline the future plan, Ahmad said Yahya still wanted to transfer political power. He did not intend to announce the holding of fresh elections. Those elected representatives without some unfavorable evidence could form the nucleus of a government.

Kissinger asked whether this would include Mujib, and Ahmad replied Mujib ranked within the first eight or so of those political leaders against whom there was evidence of conspiring to secession. However, the rest of the Awami League could drop its title and form a government. They could operate on the basis of an agreement as close to the six points as possible, meeting East Pakistan's legitimate needs.

Later that day, Ahmad met Nixon in Washington. Nixon said many of his critics felt that the United States should become heavily involved in telling Pakistan how to work out its political difficulties. He vowed Washington would not get involved in that way. It was wrong, he concluded, to assume that America should go around telling other countries how to arrange their political affairs.

Ahmad said Yahya had made every effort to negotiate a political arrangement with the East Pakistani leaders. He had made it clear from the start that he was willing to grant virtual autonomy within the framework of one country. He had told Mujib he should not come to a soldier – Yahya – and ask him to split the country. If he wanted to do that, he should try to do it through the constituent assembly. Yahya had agreed to grant virtual autonomy as described in the six points, but Mujib apparently wanted independence, Ahmad told Nixon.

Farland, the U.S. ambassador in Islamabad, gave his position in a cable to the State Department.

"It has been this embassy's consistent opinion that Yahya was sincere in his efforts to bring about a political solution under a system recognizing the population majority of East Pakistan," Farland wrote. "He never left any doubt, however, that the system would have to be consistent with the concept of one Pakistan rather than two [or more]. It will be disputed whether Yahya and the military came down to final stages of the political



parleys in Dacca in March with the true desire to work out differences or whether they were merely stalling for time, while bringing in military reinforcements. The truth may be a mixture of the two. We believe that Yahya continued to prefer a political solution acceptable to all the major parties. On the other hand, it was doubtless considered at least prudent to beef up the military presence in the East wing as a contingency measure.”

In fact, other accounts – including the ones given by the Americans – indicated Mujib and Yahya had reached a deal, in principle, on 21 March. Their respective delegations then started working on the details of wording. The same day, Bhutto arrived in Dhaka, worried about the tentative deal and determined to derail a final agreement. Surrounded by his personal bodyguards, all bearing machine guns, Bhutto occupied the eleventh floor of the Intercontinental Hotel. He turned down the tentative deal. On 24 March, Mujib’s advisers accepted the pact with minor changes to the power transfer document as suggested by the president’s economic adviser.

On 25 March on the second anniversary of Yahya’s takeover, Mujib waited patiently for a call from Yahya’s advisers to set a time for the final meeting in the afternoon. He became suspicious when he heard that Yahya’s economic adviser had left for West Pakistan in the morning. In the afternoon, Bhutto told a news conference in Dhaka that he opposed Mujib’s six-point program. At 5:45 p.m., Yahya left the heavily guarded president’s house and secretly boarded a plane for West Pakistan. The moment a message flashed Yahya’s safe landing in West Pakistan, the generals in Dhaka issued the fateful order to begin the military operation.

At about 1 a.m., three military vehicles filled with soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Z.A. Khan, reached Mujib’s house. Khan, later authored *The Way It Was*, an account of the military action in East Pakistan, published in 1998. Khan had come to Dhaka on 23 March from Comilla, where he was stationed, to discuss a command problem. Upon his arrival, he was asked to report to the martial law headquarters where Colonel S.D. Ahmad told him Mujib was to be arrested the next day and he had to make the necessary plan as the leader of the operation. He was told to see General Rao Farman Ali in the morning of 24 March for a formal order. Farman Ali told the colonel the arrest would take place in the night of 25 March. But Z.A. Khan and Farman Ali differed on how to carry out the arrest, and the colonel took his case to General Osman Mitha, who was appointed deputy commander by Tikka Khan. Mitha took the colonel to General Hamid Khan, who upheld Z.A. Khan’s decision and ordered General Farman Ali to provide the needed help. Hamid Khan ordered the colonel to take Mujib into custody alive, and cautioned that Z.A. Khan would be held responsible if Mujib was harmed.

When the soldiers reached Mujib’s house, they started firing randomly. From the second floor, Mujib shouted: “Stop firing!” but the shooting continued. One man was killed. Putting his wife and children into a room for safety, Mujib shouted again, this time loudly, “Stop firing!” When the firing subsided, the colonel entered the house. Finding no one downstairs, he went upstairs and found Mujib standing outside the room, which was closed from inside. One soldier hit him on his face. When the colonel asked Mujib to accompany him, he asked if he could say goodbye to his family. He went into the room and came out quickly and then walked with the colonel to the military vehicles parked in front of his house.

Mujib then told the colonel he had forgotten his pipe. The colonel went back into the house with Mujib to bring his pipe. By then Mujib had summoned back his courage, realising that the military would not harm him, and scolded the colonel: “Why didn’t you call me and come? I am always here.” The colonel replied the military wanted to show him he could be arrested. Mujib remained in the Dhaka cantonment for a week before he was flown to West Pakistan.

The Americans remained convinced till the end that Mujib did not want to break Pakistan. He would have possibly opted for a confederation even in November, if given an option. “I don’t think Mujib’s objective in March was complete separatism or independence. Even now, I don’t think some form of loose confederation between Yahya and Mujib is impossible,” Sisco told Kissinger on 24 November 1971, in Washington.

Sisco also believed India would accept a peaceful solution if Mujib were given power. India, he said, did not want war. “If Mujib were back in power, he would organize an East Pakistan government and it wouldn’t be long before it was a separate entity or independent.”

Bhutto, who watched from his hotel his country burning into history, left Dhaka on 26 March in the morning. He eventually sought to salvage Pakistan by proposing a compromise with Mujib in a Security Council resolution three days before Dhaka fell, but his move came way too late. He had put the final nail in Pakistan’s coffin by pursuing his misguided ambition to rule the country. Yahya played his part – perhaps unwittingly – by joining Bhutto’s “duck shooting” party in Larkana, Bhutto’s hometown, after his difficulty with Mujib, a steadfast devotee of the Bengalis’ emancipation. The top Pakistani generals, who doubted Mujib’s patriotism and viewed the Bengalis less than true Muslims, aided Pakistan’s demise by misleading Yahya into a military adventure they mistakenly believed could easily put out the fire ignited by the Bengali revolt.

The Americans blamed Bhutto for the collapse of the Dhaka talks. “Bhutto’s own intransigence was the primary factor in prompting Yahya to crack down on the Bengalis in March 1971,” commented William Spengler, U.S. consul general in Lahore. He made the remark while commenting on a speech made by Bhutto in Gujranwala on 4 April 1975. In that speech, Bhutto claimed Mujib’s six-point program was authored by foreigners, an indirect reference to India. Drawing a parallel to East Pakistan, Bhutto alleged the politicians in Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier Province were hatching a conspiracy with foreigners – in this case Afghanistan – to further break apart whatever remained of Pakistan. It was a time when Bhutto faced a strong challenge to his power from Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier Province.

Bhutto’s claim generated a sharp reaction from the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan. Bhutto’s Gujranwala speech, ostensibly aimed at “squabbles with domestic opposition, represented the initiation of a campaign to present the public with a calculated explanation that his 1969-71 activities were designed to prevent West Pakistan from disintegrating. However, we would expect the opposition to note his conspicuous skirting of his role in the collapse of the Yahya-Mujib negotiations and charge him with the major responsibility for the split-off of the East wing,” Spengler observed in a cable to the State Department on 7 April 1975.

## Kissinger's Diplomacy: Tryst with Failure

**L**ong before the Awami League's landslide victory in the nation's first free election, American foreign policy experts had predicted Pakistan's possible partition. The historic poll, they felt, put the final nail on Pakistan's coffin, as it gave the Awami League an absolute majority in parliament.

An American intelligence estimate in October 1970 said: "Pakistan's domestic political prospects are clouded. A constituent assembly to be chosen in December 1970 may lead to a new, elected government. But such a regime's life expectancy is open to question. Over time, East and West Pakistan seem more likely than not to become separate nations. Partition would hurt both economies, but the West wing would soon recover, while the East would stagnate."

Despite the forecast, the State Department was divided on America's posture towards Pakistan. The department's top policymakers viewed the East Pakistan situation vastly differently from what many diplomats in the field witnessed. Washington's policy machinery was slow to come to terms with the brewing crisis, although the Americans did not completely take their eyes off South Asia.

On 6 March, a day before Sheikh Mujib made his historic address in Dhaka, Kissinger chaired a meeting of the Senior Review Group, a panel comprising senior civilian and military officials, to discuss the Pakistan crisis.

Fourteen officials gathered around a table: four from the State Department, two from the Defence Department, two from the Central Intelligence Agency, two from the Joint Chiefs, and four from the National Security Council staff.

State Department officials included: U. Alexis Johnson, under secretary for political affairs, the third-highest official at the State Department; Christopher Van Hollen, deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs; William Spengler, country director for Pakistan and Afghanistan at the State Department; and Thomas Thornton, member of policy planning staff at the State Department.

Pentagon representatives included: James S. Noyes, deputy assistant secretary for International Security Affairs; and Brig. General Devol Brett, director of Near East and South Asia. From the CIA came Director Richard Helms and David H. Blee, chief of Near East and South Asia Division.

Colonel Richard Kennedy, member of the National Security Council staff, Saunders, Hoskinson, and Jeanne W. Davis, director, National Security Council staff, Vice Admiral John Weinell, assistant to the Joint Chiefs chairman, and Colonel James Connell, of the Joint Chiefs, also attended.

Opening the discussion, Johnson remarked that he believed all major players – the United States, the Soviet Union and India – had no interest in breaking up Pakistan. Even if America did have an interest, he said, it had no control over the events and very little influence to affect its course. Johnson felt that if America put off a decision on East Pakistan for a few days, Washington would not face an immediate problem.

The group found itself grappling with two serious questions: If Mujib told the United States he would unilaterally declare independence and asked what Washington's attitude would be, America would then face the issue of what to say. On the other hand, if Yahya used force against East Pakistan, America must decide what attitude to adopt.

If Yahya used force, he could deploy 20,000 soldiers, including 12,000 combat troops, in a hostile land of 75 million Bengalis. It would result in a bloodbath "with no hope of West Pakistan re-establishing control over East Pakistan."

"In this event, we would be interested in bringing about a cessation of hostilities, but the question of whether we or others should take the lead remains to be seen. We are talking with the British this afternoon about the situation," Johnson revealed.

### Dark Clouds Over Pakistan

The Americans saw dark clouds over Pakistan's skies. "While we have maintained a posture of hoping the country can be brought together and its unity preserved, the chances of doing so now are extremely slight. It is only a question of time and circumstances as to how they will split and to what degree the split is complete or may be papered over in some vague confederal scheme," Johnson offered.

He planned to give the U.S. missions in Dhaka and Islamabad a flavor of the group's thinking and to instruct Dhaka to stall if Mujib approached the consul general seeking recognition of a new East Pakistan regime.

"In general, we would like to see the unity preserved. If it cannot be, we would like to see the split takes place with the least possible bloodshed or disorder. If Mujib approaches us, we will have to walk a tightrope between making him think we are not giving him the cold shoulder and not encouraging him to move toward a split, if any hope remains for a compromise."

Van Hollen, deputy assistant secretary of state, revealed that the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad had learned that Yahya had already resolved to use force to control East Pakistan. But he believed that West Pakistan might accept something short of a unilateral declaration of independence, eliminating the need for using force.

The Americans painted another scenario under which Pakistan's two wings would run their own affairs, giving Mujib control in the East and Bhutto in the West. Kissinger saw no problem to go along with such a solution if West Pakistan accepted it. But if the West rejected, then America again would face the issue of recognising East Pakistan as a new country.

The Americans were convinced of Mujib's popularity because of his massive election victory, which had given him 167 of 169 parliament seats allocated for East Pakistan. He was considered friendly towards America, as his mentor, H.S. Shurawady, who was Pakistan's prime minister in the 1950s. On the contrary, Bhutto was "almost unparalldedly unfriendly" to Washington.

Johnson opposed Pakistan's use of force: "On the autonomy, if West Pakistan does not accept that solution and seeks to use force, I think we would want to discourage the use of force. We would do the same in the event of a unilateral declaration of independence." Because Mujib had campaigned on East Pakistan's full autonomy, America feared he could leave Pakistan, if the military rulers refused to grant him autonomy.

Kissinger played the devil's advocate, asking Johnson, "Why should America do anything at all?"

Johnson explained what was at stake: "If the West Pakistanis use force, there will be a bloodbath or, at least, a situation of great turmoil in East Pakistan. If it is quickly over, there would be no problem. But if it continues, there would be problems. The Indians, and possibly others, might feel impelled to intervene if it continued."

Johnson's response elicited more questions from Kissinger. "What would we do to discourage use of force? Tell Yahya we don't favor it?"

Johnson answered: "We would first go to the British to try to get them to take the lead. We shouldn't take the lead."

Despite drawing doom and gloom scenarios, the Americans remained convinced that keeping their mouth shut was the best course of action, at least for the moment. They feared that Yahya would turn against America, because Pakistan suspected Washington of favoring East Pakistan's independence. "If we tell Yahya to call off the use of force, it will merely fuel this suspicion," Van Hollen noted.

Kissinger reminded the group of the position being taken by President Nixon, who was preoccupied with establishing ties to China with Yahya's help. "The president will be very reluctant to do anything that Yahya could interpret as a personal affront. When we talk about trying to discourage the West Pakistan intervention, we mean try to get another country with a history of concern in the area to do it. Would they do it in both our names?"

Johnson persisted with his line of thinking: "We've just begun to look for someone to do it, if necessary. How it is done and the degree of our association will be decided at the time. Our objective is to discourage the use of force."

Kissinger continued with his probing questions: Would Yahya soon be gone?

"Not necessarily," answered Van Hollen. "He could still remain as president, with Bhutto wielding all effective political power."

Yahya had played off Bhutto against East Pakistan. Kissinger offered a scenario: If East Pakistan became independent, Bhutto would control West Pakistan

Even if that happened, Van Hollen added, "Yahya will continue to represent the military establishment, which is a significant political force in West Pakistan. He may retain some limited residual power." The following exchange of views then transpired:

Kissinger: "In any event, we can't neglect him."

Johnson: "No."

Kissinger: "Let's keep that in mind."

Johnson: "It would be most unwise to do anything to prejudice our relations with Yahya. To whatever degree he remains and has power, we should do what we can to help him."

Kissinger: "Would it make any difference if we suggested to West Pakistan that use of force would be unwise? You understand I don't mind having another country taking the rap."

Johnson: "When we say 'discourage' or 'participate in discouraging' we don't mean pound the table and tell them they can't do it. We mean discuss it with them."

CIA's Helms had a different take. While most of the members of Nixon's foreign policy team viewed Pakistan's crisis as serious stuff, the CIA boss labeled it merely as a family squabbling. "We don't want to get into a family fight," Helms said

But Kissinger would not drop the ball altogether: "If we could go in mildly as a friend to say we think it's a bad idea, it wouldn't be so bad. But if the country is breaking up, they won't be likely to receive such a message calmly. If we can get the British to do it, I wish them well!"

Johnson concurred. "We can't reach a decision now on how to proceed. If we can get someone else to take the lead, okay. If not, we will have to decide whether we want to do anything. I am not proposing we do anything, but it is a course of action we may have to consider."

Kissinger: "I think we all see the pros and cons clearly. Alex [Johnson] and I will talk after his talks with the British. Every department will be consulted before we make any move. We will also have a chance to take the issue before the president, if necessary."

Van Hollen argued that the British might be very reluctant to do anything. However, if London agreed, it would have some advantages, "because the Pakistanis are not as suspicious of the British as they are of us."

Kissinger wondered whether sending the American ambassador in to argue against using force did not buy the United States "the worst of everything. Will our doing so make the slightest difference? I can't imagine that they give a damn what we think."

Helms agreed: "My visceral reaction is to keep our distance as long as we can."

Kissinger said Johnson would talk to the British if Mujib made a conciliatory speech on 7 March. He then wondered: "What if they declare their independence? Will we get an immediate recognition request?"

Johnson thought Mujib could seek America's recognition, "but we don't have to rush. We can see what Mujib says in his approach to us. We shouldn't be the first to recognize. We will want to consult with the British first since they have interests in both East and West Pakistan."

Van Hollen suggested consulting with Japan, West Germany and France.

Johnson advocated against America being the first nation to recognize East Pakistan's independence: "We will want to recognize eventually, but not be the first."

Kissinger wanted to know what the U.S. consul general in Dhaka should do if the East Pakistanis sought America's recognition.

He would refer to Washington, Van Hollen suggested.

Kissinger then asked whether Washington should consult with India if a military situation developed. "I wonder whether we should do that. I can see that, if there is a threat of Indian military intervention, we might wish to advise them that we think it unwise."

Van Hollen: "The prospect of Indian intervention is very slim in the early stages."

Kissinger thought the Chinese were unlikely to intervene militarily.

Van Hollen wanted to explore how the United States would act if a real bloodbath developed, something comparable to the Biafra situation,

grabbing international attention.

Both Kissinger and Johnson opposed imposing sanctions on West Pakistan or recalling the U.S. ambassador from Islamabad, but the group came to no conclusion as to what should be done.

They all agreed, though, that very little could be gained by the U.S. diplomatic intervention. The best posture to take was to do nothing that Yahya might find objectionable. The choice was basically between continuing on this course, at least until the situation jelled, and weighing in with Yahya to prevent a bloody civil war.

Kissinger based his do-nothing approach on two premises: (1) "It is not necessary for us to shift now to a more activist approach since Yahya knows we favor unity and is doing everything possible to achieve a political settlement." (2) "It is undesirable for us to intervene now since we could realistically have little influence on the situation and anything we might do could be resented by the West Pakistanis as unwarranted interference and jeopardize our future relations."

He, however, was fully cognisant of the downside to his policy of sitting idle.

"The main cost of following this approach," Kissinger elaborated, "is that it may jeopardize our future relations with East Pakistan if it becomes independent. On balance, however, it is a more defensible position to operate as if the country remains united than to take any move that would appear to encourage separation."

On 13 March, Kissinger told Nixon in a memo that an immediate outbreak of violence between East and West Pakistan had been avoided, but "the prospects for reconciliation and settlement remain poor." Nixon put a check mark on the memorandum to indicate he saw it.

By mid-March, the Americans had become increasingly convinced that Yahya would use force to keep Pakistan's unity, if necessary. They saw danger signs in Yahya's actions. One hint came from his decision to replace the military governor in East Pakistan with a general who was more tough, General Tikka Khan. The other was the harsh tone he took in his 6 March speech, sending out an explicit warning that force would be used against any move for separation.

America also took as clue Pakistan's troop reinforcement in the East wing through Sri Lanka. Yahya might personally lean towards conciliation, but he must answer to the dominant hardliners in his army who favored a crackdown on the Bengalis.

Washington also saw a hardening of attitude on the part of the Awami League. While Mujib refrained from an open declaration of independence, his 7 March speech conveyed a harsher tone. It seemed apparent that his retreat was tactical, Kissinger told Nixon in his memo.

"His speech last Sunday would suggest an effort to achieve his goal by gradual assertion of power without risking a direct confrontation with the army that might follow a unilateral declaration of independence," Kissinger's memo noted.

Mujib quite openly took issue with Yahya, claiming that his Awami League was the only legitimate source of authority in the country. The Bengali leader's posture prompted the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad to advise Washington that Mujib's goal remained unchanged – East Pakistan's "emancipation" from West Pakistan's domination.

Kissinger interpreted "this could still conceivably mean full provincial autonomy within a united Pakistan." But it was just as likely, if not more so, that Mujib had concluded the freedom he sought was only attainable by outright independence.

Kissinger then outlined various possible steps Yahya could undertake and summed up by saying: "In short, the Pakistan crisis is far from over and could suddenly flare up again."

A short time later, East Pakistan plunged into a river of blood. When Kissinger briefed Nixon after the military crackdown on 26 March 1971, he advised the president to wait on deciding whether to ask Yahya to stop the bloodshed.

"It is probably a bit early to make this decision today because we do not yet know whether calm will be restored in the East or whether the pattern of violence will continue and broaden. This, therefore, seems a decision for the next two or three days," Kissinger told Nixon.

On the issue of how to respond to a definitive announcement of East Pakistani independence, Kissinger noted that "our consul general has standing instructions to refer any such question to Washington. The issue might remain unclear for some time if the military re-establishes control in the cities and the resistance moves to the countryside. On the other hand, our response will set the tone for our relationship with both the wings."

He promised Nixon to send recommendations after a meeting of the president's top foreign policy advisers. Kissinger held a meeting of the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) later in the day. When he was told the military arrested Mujib after his talks with Yahya had collapsed, Kissinger asked what would happen next.

Van Hollen was the first to offer his views: "The ability of the West Pakistani forces to maintain law and order in East Pakistan over the long run approaches zero. They may be able to control Dacca, but the Awami leadership will move to the countryside."

Despite the possibility of an escalation of fighting looming in the horizon, the group agreed America needed to do nothing for the moment. Kissinger told the group that Nixon refused to be "in a position where he can be accused of having encouraged the split-up of Pakistan. He does not favor a very active policy. This probably means that we would not undertake to warn Yahya against a civil war."

Kissinger then queried, how the United States would act if it were asked to recognize East Pakistan's independence. Despite the sharp turn of events, no new line of thinking had evolved.

Van Hollen advocated a "go-slow" approach.

Kissinger: "I talked to the Indian ambassador the other day. He said that the Indians preferred Pakistan to remain united because of the pressure an independent Bengal would create" on the on-going communist movement in West Bengal.

Later in the day, Kissinger briefed Nixon: "Our embassy believes that the military probably has sufficient strength to assert immediate control over Dacca and other major cities, but is not capable of maintaining control over an extended period."

After reviewing East Pakistan's situation, on 26 March the WSAG recommended continuing the policy adopted earlier – the United States should not get involved in the dispute between West and East Pakistan.

Particularly, it suggested, the United States should avoid being in a situation where it could be accused of encouraging Pakistan's breakup. The panel agreed America should delay any action on the recognition of an independent East Pakistani, should it receive such a request.

American diplomats traced the motivations behind the Pakistani military action in East Pakistan to the events at least as far back as the creation of Pakistan in 1947. The CIA prepared an assessment 19 January 1971, on the future direction of Pakistan's foreign policy. The study highlighted

the two wings' opposing goals: East Pakistan, seeking economic justice for the Bengalis, hoped for better relations with India; West Pakistan, preoccupied with Kashmir, pursued a hostile posture towards New Delhi.

For the Bengalis, Kashmir was neither an emotional nor an especially urgent issue. During the 1970 election campaign, Mujib gave mere lip service to Kashmir's self-determination. Privately, he urged the issue be put on the back burner in order to first address East Pakistan's pressing matters.

"We believe that normalization of relations with our neighbors would be to the best advantage of our peoples," Mujib had told the nation in a broadcast in 1970. He wanted to resume trade with India and get water for East Pakistan from India. East Pakistani jute was shipped to Kolkata via Singapore. Assam could no longer export agricultural products by river through East Pakistan. East Pakistan imported coal from fields thousands of miles away in China, instead of Indian fields only a few hundred miles away.

"Mujib and most East Pakistanis would not view India in the same light as have Pakistan's rulers," the CIA report noted, predicting how Pakistan would conduct foreign policy if Mujib became prime minister. "Because of their struggle for provincial autonomy, the Bengalis of East Pakistan see domination from West Pakistan as a more immediate threat to their independence than India, and considerations, such as competition with New Delhi for international prestige, have been irrelevant to the Bengali cause."

## U.S. Turns a Blind Eye to Massacre

Still, the Americans believed that the principle of a better deal for the East wing had won increasing acceptance in West Pakistan, even among hardliners, such as the military leadership, for whom Pakistan's integrity was the *summum bonum*. This was reflected in Yahya's protracted efforts to achieve an acceptable political basis for the transfer of power. This was the assessment of the American ambassador – turning a blind eye to the March massacre – terming it as a natural course of action by a government to keep order in a country by cracking down on a group that flouted the law.

"Yahya's use of the military force in East Pakistan on 25-26 March, precisely two years after he replaced Ayub as president, came after a period of several weeks during which Mujib and his Awami League had in effect been ruling East Pakistan through a parallel government," he said. "The orders promulgated and enforced by the Awami League amounted to a rebellion against the established government in the eyes of the West Pakistanis. The destruction of Pakistan flags and their replacement by Bangladesh standards and impediments placed in the way of civil and military activities in East Pakistan could have been described as acts of insurrection."

Morally abhorrent though it might be, Farland continued, a pragmatist one could not but accept such measures in trying times.

"We can hold no brief for what seems to have been the brutal, ruthless and excessive use of force by the Pak military not only in putting down the limited resistance but in seeking out and destroying presumed opponents in East Pakistan. Incidents involving wanton military force, which the consul general in Dacca and others have reported, arouse our indignation, and we can appreciate the sense of horror felt by witnesses at the scene. Since we are not only human beings but also government servants, however righteous indignation is not of itself an adequate basis for our reaction to the events now occurring in East Pakistan. The constituted government is using force against citizens accused of flouting its authority," the ambassador justified.

The American embassy in Islamabad supported continuing the same do-nothing policy even after the crackdown. Although the crisis had "changed the course, but problems remain essentially internal to Pakistan," the embassy maintained. "In this embassy's view, deplorable as the current events in East Pakistan may be, it is undesirable that they be raised to the level of contentious international political issue."

Farland's views guided the Nixon administration until the fighting eventually engulfed India nine months later.

On 21 April, Farland sent a back-channel message to Kissinger, supporting America's pro-Yahya policy despite stiff opposition from the U.S. diplomats posted in Dhaka. He argued that the United States "would be expected to make early financial commitments far beyond" what it could afford, if East Pakistan became independent. Farland dismissed the notion that America's opposition to an independent East Pakistan would antagonize the Bengalis for too long, an apprehension some policymakers cited to buttress their position to lean on Yahya.

"Advocates for a pro-Bangladesh posture also argue that Bengali goodwill will be irreparably lost unless the United States immediately changes its policy from that which has been declared to that of support for an independent East Pakistan," he said. "This argument certainly would be valid as far as many individual Bengalis are concerned, but given the premise that Bangladesh does come into being some time in the future, I submit that the economic and administrative needs will be so great that the U.S. government friendship and aid will be eagerly sought after by the new government."

The Nixon administration's initial policy after the crackdown was based on its concern about the stability of the region, which was geopolitically significant in terms of the Soviet Union and China. India was of potentially greater significance than Pakistan. Therefore, in formulating U.S. policy, the relative preeminence of American interests in India was an underlying factor in the decisions that Washington made. As a result, on an operational level, America wanted to keep a close relationship with India and reasonable relations with West Pakistan, while avoiding steps that could irreparably damage a yet-undefined future relationship with East Pakistan. Three major ingredients were behind the strategy that America followed since the civil war started: restraint, international aid, and political accommodation.

Washington advised both Islamabad and New Delhi to exercise restraint to avoid an all-out war. On the Indian side, this reinforced restraint, although contingency planning for war continued. America's counsel was somewhat less successful in Pakistan.

America put considerable effort into lessening India's refugee burden. Washington considered it to be the most likely cause for war between India and Pakistan. To this end, America offered grants and loans to India and actively promoted the relief effort of the United Nations. On the Pakistani side, Washington promoted an international relief effort to help the refugees return home. Islamabad initially responded slowly, but later embraced it.

The Nixon administration urged Yahya to move as fast as possible with political accommodation in East Pakistan. Recognising the complex and sensitive issues involved and the fact that Yahya might have had only limited political flexibility, Washington refrained from attempting to spell out the details beyond the need to deal with political leaders. However, these efforts bore no meaningful results.

On July 8, Kissinger met with Yahya in Islamabad, but did not prepare a record of his conversation. In his memoirs, he wrote that Yahya was

oblivious to his perils. Yahya and his colleagues felt that India did not want war. They were convinced that they would win, if India really attacked. When Kissinger pointed to India's advantage in numbers and equipment, Yahya, who claimed to be directly descended from the lineage of warrior nobles who fought in the elite armies of Nadir Shah, the Persian adventurer who conquered Delhi in the eighteenth century, "answered with bravado about the historic superiority of Moslem fighters".

Upon his return to Washington, Kissinger prepared a memo for the record on his trip to Asia. A copy of this report was sent to Rogers, who was then staying in the Western White House in California.

"Most are still talking about the importance of a political settlement in East Pakistan, but I sense an increasing judgment that Yahya does not have the capacity to bring this off, certainly not on his present course. There seems to be a growing sense of the inevitability of war or at least widespread Hindu-Muslim violence, not necessarily because anyone wants it but because in the end they fear they will not know how to avoid it," Kissinger wrote.

Based on his conversation with Singh during his visit to New Delhi, Kissinger concluded that India would accept a settlement excluding Mujib. "In a brief private session, he told me that India would not insist on a settlement involving the jailed East Pakistani leader, Mujibur Rahman, but would be satisfied if Pakistan could come up with a solution that is nonmilitary and noncommunal; i.e., is not biased against the Hindus."

Kissinger's trust in Singh was misplaced. India could not have possibly supported a settlement without Mujib because no other Awami League leader could pull off a deal with Yahya that would win the approval of the Bengali masses. And, unless the Awami League assumed power in East Pakistan, the traumatized Hindus would not have returned home, a situation India was reluctant to live with. Kissinger's warning on war, though, fell on deaf ears in both India and Pakistan; neither side took it seriously. India had already made up its mind that an independent Bangladesh served its interests best by creating a condition conducive to the repatriation of the refugees and eliminating its arch enemy once and for all. Pakistan, on the other hand, mistakenly believed India would not wage a war against a country that was supported by a communist giant and a superpower. Even if New Delhi was foolish enough to embark upon such a misadventure, Yahya miscalculated that his brave Muslim warriors would prevail against the Hindu soldiers, whom he perceived to be timid.

## Blood Telegram: Diplomatic Revolt in East Pakistan

The United States, which initially decided to maintain a hands-off posture in the East Pakistan conflict, got a wake-up call when Archer Blood, the U.S. consul general in Dhaka, sent a telegram to Washington on 28 March 1971, on the Bengali massacre. He questioned the wisdom of America's do-nothing policy that ignored the dire situation on the ground.

"Here in Dacca, we are mute and horrified witnesses to a reign of terror by the Pakistani military," he vented. "Evidence continues to mount that the martial law authorities have a list of Awami League supporters whom they are systematically eliminating by seeking them out in their homes and shooting them down."

In addition to the Awami Leaguers, student leaders and university faculty were also among those killed by the military. With the military's support, non-Bengali Muslims systematically attacked poor people's quarters, murdering the Bengalis. Dhaka's streets swarmed with the Hindus and others seeking to flee the city. The envoy reported that many Bengalis had sought refuge in the homes of the Americans, most of whom were extending them shelter.

"The full horror of Pak military atrocities will come to light sooner or later. I, therefore, question continued advisability of the present U.S. government posture of pretending to believe the government of Pakistan's false assertions," Blood fumed.

"We should be expressing our shock, at least privately to the government of Pakistan, at this wave of terror directed against their own countrymen by the Pak military. I, of course, would have to be identified as the source of information and, presumably, the government of Pakistan would ask me to leave. I do not believe the safety of the American community would be threatened as a consequence, but our communication capability would be compromised."

The consulate general reported that the army was setting houses on fire and shooting people as they emerged from the burning houses. On 30 March, the mission reported that the army had killed many apparently unarmed students at Dhaka University.

The U.S. Embassy in Islamabad concurred with the recommendation to express the consulate's sense of horror and indignation at the "brutal, ruthless and excessive use of force by the Pak military," but opposed any action by Washington. Farland advised: "In this embassy's view, deplorable as current events in East Pakistan may be, it is undesirable that they be raised to [the] level of contentious international political issue."

When Nixon, in a telephone conversation on 29 March, briefly discussed with Kissinger the reports of atrocities in East Pakistan, he agreed with the position taken by Farland. "I wouldn't put out a statement praising it, but we're not going to condemn it, either," Nixon told Kissinger.

Nixon discussed Pakistan's crisis with Kissinger from San Clemente, California. When he asked if there was anything of interest, Kissinger told him, "Apparently, Yahya has got control of East Pakistan."

"The use of power against seeming odds pays off," Kissinger added. "All the experts were saying that 30,000 people can't get control of 75 million. Well, this may still turn out to be true, but as of this moment it seems to be quiet."

Nixon commented: "Well, maybe things have changed. But hell, when you look over the history of nations 30,000 well-disciplined people can take 75 million any time. Look what the Spanish did when they came in and took the Incas and all the rest. Look what the British did when they took India."

Kissinger: "The Bengalis have been extremely difficult to govern throughout their history."

Nixon: "The Indians can't govern them, either."

Kissinger: "Actually, the Indians whom one normally would expect to favor a breakup of Pakistan aren't so eager for this one. Because they're afraid that East Pakistan may in time, or East Bengal may in time, have an attraction for West Bengal with Calcutta and also that the Chinese will gain a lot of influence there."

Kissinger ended by saying, "And that, I think, is a good chance."

Kissinger talked with Nixon once again the next day. Nixon still favored continuing America's do-nothing strategy. "The main thing to do is to keep cool and not do anything. There's nothing in it for us either way," the president told his national security aide.

The day Blood sent his report from Dhaka, Hoskinson of the National Security Council, prepared a memorandum for Kissinger, painting a gloomy picture for Pakistan. East Pakistan's situation apparently had taken another turn for the worse, he wrote. Having beaten down the initial surge of resistance, the army now appeared to have embarked on a reign of terror aimed at eliminating the core of future resistance. At least, this seemed to be the situation in Dhaka. "We have virtually no reliable information on the situation in the other major cities or what is going on in the countryside where most of the population resides."

Echoing Blood's views, Hoskinson's report also questioned the wisdom of ignoring the atrocities. Should America express "our shock at least privately to the West Pakistanis?" he asked. Citing Blood's telegram, he said, "the time has now come to approach the West Pakistanis."

Hoskinson said the Indians were clearly nervous about the situation, but unlikely to intervene. However, Gandhi faced pressure and "we know that they are dusting off their own contingency plans." He advocated closer consultations with India. "When tensions are high in the subcontinent, there is always a chance that another irrational move could ignite a larger and even more serious conflict. Is now the time, as our contingency plans would seem to suggest, to begin closer consultations with New Delhi?"

He recommended that Kissinger put Pakistan on his agenda for discussion at the next meeting of the Senior Review Group, a panel of policymakers in Washington. But there was only a passing discussion of the issue when the group met on 31 March.

During the meeting, Johnson informed Kissinger that Secretary of State William Rogers felt that the "sentiment in India may force the Indians to be the first to recognize Bangladesh – unless Ambassador Keating beats them to the punch." Kenneth Keating was then America's ambassador to

India.

Lieutenant General Robert Cushman, deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, said Pakistan's situation posed a problem for India and raised a question whether or not New Delhi should support the Bengalis.

Kissinger responded by saying that India would suffer from an independent state in East Pakistan. It could create problems in West Bengal, where a communist insurgency had by then caused a big headache for New Delhi. He then asked how the Pakistani soldiers would fare in the countryside in East Pakistan; could 30,000 troops control the 75 million Bengalis?

Cushman made a dire prediction: The situation "could be very bloody."

Kissinger then asked whether the Bengalis in the countryside were politically conscious and whether they would fight against the Pakistani soldiers.

David Blee, head of CIA's Soviet division, replied: "The Bengalis are extremely politically conscious, but they are not fighters."

Johnson argued that, ultimately, 30,000 troops would be unable to control 75 million Bengalis.

Blee added the Bengalis would seek help from India.

When Kissinger asked if India would help, Blee pointed out that a huge 400 out of 525 members of the Lok Sabha [the lower house of India's parliament] had signed a petition demanding recognition for East Pakistan as an independent nation.

Cushman observed: If India did not, the Chinese would aid the Bengalis.

Blee agreed. China right now supported West Pakistan, but Beijing could change its policy.

Kissinger asked whether Pakistan would execute Mujib.

Pakistan might do so, Blee said.

Kissinger asked Blee if professor Abdur Razzak of Dhaka University had been killed. "He was one of my students" at Harvard, Kissinger recalled.

Blee said: "I think so. They killed a lot of people at the university."

Seven days after the Dhaka massacre, on 3 April the secretary of state told Nixon that East Pakistan's situation had seriously deteriorated over the last ten days. What exactly happened on the night of 25-26 March after the military crackdown in Dhaka might never be known because reports were conflicting and first-hand evidence was scarce, Rogers said, adding that the U.S. consul general in Dhaka estimated that between 4000 and 6000 people were killed in the city over the next several days.

Extensive damage was done to Dhaka University, pro-Awami League newspaper offices and to Hindu settlements in Dhaka. Chittagong also suffered considerable damage and fatalities. A semblance of normality had returned to Dhaka, but small-arms firing could still be heard at night in residential areas where the Americans lived. Some foreigners had already narrowly escaped with their lives. Most shops remained closed. A very small portion of the civil servants were at work in government offices. It was impossible for foreigners to leave the vicinity of Dhaka or Chittagong, where most of the nearly 750 Americans in East Pakistan lived.

East Pakistan's future would depend upon the Pakistan armed forces' ability to maintain an effective military control. Thus far, the Awami League resistance groups had gained little momentum. However, the memo warned, over time these resistance elements might be able to mount a large-scale rebellion with possible covert support from the Bengali elements in India. The key question, Rogers wondered, was whether the events had made it unlikely – or impossible – for Pakistan ever again to assert effective political influence over the East.

"During the period immediately ahead we may be faced with a number of difficult policy decisions. These include our political reaction to the events in East Pakistan and various aspects of our economic assistance and military supply programs for Pakistan," the secretary told Nixon.

## **"Blood Telegram" Criticizes Nixon Policy**

Soon afterward, on 6 April, the U.S. mission in Dhaka sent a telegram to the State Department in which twenty diplomats voiced their concern over Washington's position on East Pakistan. The message was later dubbed as the "Blood telegram" after Archer Blood, then the U.S. consul general in Dhaka.

"Our government has failed to denounce the suppression of democracy. Our government has failed to denounce atrocities. Our government has failed to take forceful measures to protect its citizens while at the same time bending over backwards to placate the West Pak dominated government and to lessen likely and deservedly negative international public relations impact against them. Our government has evidenced what many will consider moral bankruptcy, ironically at a time when the U.S.S.R. sent President Yahya a message defending democracy, condemning arrest of the leader of the democratically elected majority party [incidentally pro-West] and calling for an end to repressive measures and bloodshed," the telegram said.

"In our most recent policy paper for Pakistan, our interests in Pakistan were defined as primarily humanitarian, rather than strategic. But we have chosen not to intervene, even morally, on the grounds that the Awami League conflict, in which unfortunately the overworked term genocide is applicable, is purely internal matter of a sovereign state. Private Americans have expressed disgust. We, as professional public servants, express our dissent with the current policy and fervently hope that our true and lasting interests here can be defined and our policies redirected in order to salvage our nation's position as a moral leader of the free world."

Blood, who himself had expressed grave concerns in his previous memo, endorsed the message, but did not sign it.

"I believe the views of these officers, who are among the finest U.S. officials in East Pakistan, are echoed by the vast majority of the American community, both official and unofficial. I also subscribe to these views but I do not think it appropriate for me to sign their statement as long as I am principal officer at this post. My support of their stand takes on another dimension."

"As I hope to develop in further reporting, I believe the most likely eventual outcome of the struggle underway in East Pakistan is a Bengali victory and the consequent establishment of an independent Bangladesh. At the moment, we possess the good will of the Awami League. We would be foolish to forfeit this asset by pursuing a rigid policy of one-sided support to the likely loser," he ended.

Blood gave the telegram low classification. In his 1979 book, *White House Years*, Kissinger said the consulate general deliberately gave the



low classification to encourage a broad circulation in Washington. The distribution limitation was later added to the telegram in the State Department.

Blood's telegram won support from several American officials. Seven specialists at the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs wrote to Rogers on 6 April, saying they shared the views expressed in the telegram. Farland supported the principle that the mission staffers had the right to express their views on the problems facing the United States in the Pakistan crisis. The embassy had also raised serious concern about the developments in East Pakistan. Farland suggested that Washington review its policy that excluded interference in Pakistan's domestic affairs.

On 7 April the State Department replied to the consulate in Dhaka. Sisco, the assistant secretary of state, drafted the telegram and Rogers approved it. Responding to the complaint that Washington failed to denounce the Pakistani military actions, Sisco blamed conflicting reports about the atrocities for the lack of sufficient response. He, however, asserted the State Department had been vocal – the department spokesman had made statements between 26 March and 5 April voicing concern about the “loss of life, damage and hardship suffered by the people of Pakistan.” But none addressed the atrocities reported from Dhaka.

The cable from Dhaka infuriated Washington, especially the secretary of state. Rogers vented his frustration with Kissinger during a telephone conversation on 6 April.

Rogers: “I wanted to talk about that goddam message from our people in” Dhaka. “Did you see it?”

Kissinger: “No.”

Rogers: “It's miserable. They bitched about our policy and have given it lots of distribution so it will probably leak. It's inexcusable.”

He then asked Kissinger to keep the telegram from Nixon and hold on to it. “I will appreciate it. In the first place, I think we have made a good choice,” Rogers said.

Kissinger promised to help: “Unless it hits the wires, I will hold it. I will not forward it.”

On 10 April 1971, Blood sent yet another dispatch in which he explained the specific reason why the staff members in Dhaka objected to the Nixon's administration policy to support Yahya against the Bengalis.

He wrote that Washington had promised in a 2 March document on the U.S. posture towards Pakistan that “if a West Pakistani intervention becomes imminent or actually occurs, we would have an interest in doing what we could to avoid bloodshed and restore peace, and to prevent the conflict from escalating beyond a purely East-West Pakistan clash. We should be willing to risk irritating the West Pakistanis in the face of such a rash act on their part, and the threat of stopping aid should give us a considerable leverage.”

“We concur with this proposal but are concerned that it seemingly has been ignored,” Blood fumed. “Our dissent with the current policy stems largely from a disagreement with our colleagues” analysis of the current situation.”

Blood said the staffers in Dhaka questioned “Yahya's bona fides in seeking a political solution that would incorporate minimal Bengali demands. Yahya's 1 March postponement of the National Assembly session for an indefinite period was taken here as vindication of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's contention voiced at the 3 January rally that “politics in Pakistan has been politics of conspiracy.”

Not only the Americans but also many Pakistanis suspected Yahya's talks were a camouflage to prepare for the military crackdown. Once such skeptic was Mumtaz Daultana, president of the Pakistan Council Muslim League. He considered Yahya's moves in the post-March 1 period as a charade, the consul general noted, adding that “we outlined our prognostication that the military repression of the moderates would radicalize them and force them to ally with the extreme left.”

The Americans in Dhaka took exception with Farland's line that “since we are not only human beings but government servants, however righteous indignation is not of itself an adequate basis for our reaction to the events now occurring in East Pakistan.”

“In a country wherein our primary interests defined as humanitarian rather than strategic, moral principles, indeed, are relevant to the issue. Horror and flouting of democratic norms we have reported are objective realities and not emotionally contrived. It is inconceivable that the world can mount a magnificent relief effort to save the victims of last November's cyclone disaster on one hand and on the other condone the indiscriminate killing of the same people by essentially an alien army defending interests different from those of the general populace.”

Blood also castigated Farland's contention that the situation should be viewed simply as a “constituted” government using force against citizens accused of flouting its authority. “Although existing as de facto government, at least in West Pakistan, the extra-constitutional martial law regime of President Yahya Khan is of dubious legitimacy. [How many votes did Yahya obtain?]”

He questioned how the martial law administration could describe the freely elected representatives of 73 percent of the voters of East Pakistan as “miscreants.” Ironically, the consul general noted, most of the countryside of East Pakistan apparently were in the hands of these miscreants.

“We do not see the issue as a distinctly internal one. Aside from international moral obligations to condemn genocide [of Pakistani Hindus, although by Webster's definition the term likewise seems applicable to Awami League followers who are being hunted down with a vengeance], geographical realities also enter the equation. The conflict has definite colonial versus anti-colonial aspects. Previous examples of people of one region fighting for freedom from the domination by people of another physically discontinuous territory historically have been glorified as revolutions, wars of national liberation, anti-colonial wars, etc. In defiance of geography, as well as ethnic and linguistic differences inveighing against the unity of Pakistan, we continue to be blinded to the reality of the situation. People of East Pakistan want to live as a free people of a free country, preferably within Pakistan, but, if given no other choice, outside it, they want to participate in deciding their own destiny. Even our forefathers fought for similar ideals. Thus, we find the view that “deplorable as current events in East Pakistan may be, it is undesirable that they be raised to the level of a ‘contentious international issue’ is a woefully inadequate reaction to the events. This contrasts sharply with the more decisive reaction of the Russians, who for their own reasons went on the public record with a message to which many of us could subscribe on grounds [of] both national interest and morality. To us, an independent ‘Bangla Dosh’ is now inevitable.”

To the end, Blood said that since the above statements were written, the staffers had sensed that Washington, Islamabad and Dhaka had started talking on approximately the same wavelength. So, there shall be no rebuttal from Washington and Islamabad to this rebuttal, he urged.

“These are matters which can best be discussed over a drink with friends and colleagues when the opportunity next presents itself,” he said, adding that the dissenters were motivated by their desire to try to influence changes in U.S. policy towards Pakistan. He promised to soon send policy recommendations to this end.

Blood's cables infuriated the White House. Nixon recalled Blood from Dhaka and assigned him to the State Department's personnel office,

despite Kissinger's concession that "there was some merit to the charge of moral insensitivity."

Blood, who died in Colorado in 2004 at the age of 81, was honored by his colleagues in 1971 with the Christian A. Herter Award for his "initiative, integrity, intellectual courage and creative dissent." The Archer K. Blood American Center Library at the U.S. Embassy in Dhaka honors his memory in an independent Bangladesh that he prophesied and supported.

Why did America continue to support Pakistan despite having full knowledge of these atrocities?

In his memoirs, Kissinger wrote that the dissent cable presented a dilemma for the administration. "The United States could not condone a brutal military repression," and there was "no doubt about the strong-arm tactics of the Pakistani military." He attributed the administration's decision not to react publicly to the military repression in East Pakistan to Nixon's desire to protect "our sole channel to China".

Peter Constable, country director of Pakistan at the State Department, provided an official explanation in a testimony after the war. He told the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in 1973 that when the East Pakistan tragedy began, America developed a policy that had three objectives: to provide humanitarian aid, to encourage a political settlement, and to prevent war.

"Throughout the crisis period, the United States was constantly alive to the dangers that increasing tensions between Pakistan and India could lend to an outbreak of war with a potential for a larger conflict that could threaten world peace," Constable told the House panel, headed by Congressman Donald Fraser.

On the political front, Washington sought to use its influence through quiet diplomacy to advance a political accommodation, a reference to the secret talks in Kolkata with Bangladesh leaders to arrange a compromise with Yahya Khan. Individual elements of the U.S. strategy, such as in gaining Yahya's assurances that he would not execute Sheikh Mujib, produced positive results, but "the overall effort at political accommodation was cut short by the eruption of a full-scale war between India and Pakistan," he added.

Fraser would not buy Constable's rationale for Nixon's tilt against India.

"Let me ask this," he said. "Suppose, the United States had been a neighbor of Bangladesh instead of India. With at least hundreds of thousands of persons being slaughtered and millions of refugees crossing the boundaries, is it your view that the United States would have felt that the massacre in Bangladesh was none of its concern and it should refrain from any intervention because it was an internal domestic matter?"

Constable budged. "We would view such a situation along our own borders with a great sense of alarm." He said Nixon refused to criticize Yahya publicly because he felt "that would be counterproductive." He rather chose to "work through quiet diplomacy and we did make an effort through quiet diplomacy. We had continuous talks with the leadership of the government of Pakistan as well as the leaders in India and with some of the Bengali leaders who were in the Bangladesh government in Calcutta working toward a solution, which we thought was a viable way to end the violence in East Pakistan."

Many in the Nixon administration, including Kissinger, blamed the president's China policy for the disastrous posture, but it is hard to take that explanation at face-value if one thoroughly studies the entire picture. America's disdain for India could be traced to the pre-Partition time as far back as 1942 – when a U.S. technical mission invited by the Indian government to investigate India's industrial resources, to recommend production of war materials, came under harsh criticism in the Indian press. America often faced accusations, even during British rule, that it interfered in Indian politics. President Roosevelt's personal envoy Colonel Louis Johnson faced such a charge during the Cripps Mission (The Cripps mission was an attempt in late March 1942 by the British government to secure Indian cooperation and support for its efforts in World War II, with a promise to grant India self-rule after the war. The mission was headed by Sir Stafford Cripps, a senior left-wing politician and government minister in the War Cabinet of Prime Minister Winston Churchill). Ironically, the Americans consistently sought to avoid these types of accusations. It was America's traditional strategy to avoid charges of interference, coupled with Nixon's personal anti-Indian mindset, that guided the administration not to press Yahya despite pleas by its diplomats to do so. Kissinger also erred in his judgement that Pakistan's military would quickly crush the Bengali rebellion and eventually find it wise to let East Pakistan become independent.

## Why Nixon Opposed India: The Indo-U.S.-Sino-Soviet Equation

While Washington decided to keep its hands off the East Pakistan situation after the dark night of March 1971, things started heating up elsewhere. India reacted sharply within a few days, with some 400 parliament members signing a petition demanding New Delhi recognize an independent East Pakistan.

On 31 March 1971, Gandhi introduced a strongly worded resolution in parliament. Adopted by both houses – the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha – the resolution expressed a “deep anguish and grave concern at recent developments in East Bengal.” It alleged that “a massive attack by the armed forces – dispatched from West Pakistan – had been unleashed against the entire people of East Bengal to suppress their urges and aspirations for freedom and prosperity.”

On 3 April, Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny sent a letter to Yahya Khan appealing for a political settlement of East Pakistan’s problem. Russia publicly appealed to Yahya to quickly end the repression in East Pakistan. On 20 April, Podgorny wrote to Yahya Khan again, criticizing the military crackdown and supporting India’s demand for a political settlement in East Pakistan.

Islamabad replied to Moscow that the situation was under control and normal routines were being restored. Yahya Khan, in a terse message on 6 April, told Podgorny that supporting interference in internal affairs of a country negates the U.N. Charter. He asked the Soviet Union to use its influence to stop New Delhi from “meddling in Pakistan’s internal affairs.”

The United States voiced its concern on 2 April for the human suffering in East Pakistan and stressed the need for multinational assistance, but refrained from putting pressure on Yahya. Nixon was worried that Asia’s power balance would be upset if Pakistan were weakened. To some extent, he was also anxious not to hurt his efforts to develop closer relations with China. Yahya, after all, was Nixon’s China link. America wanted a stable Asia, and China’s support, for its planned withdrawal from Vietnam.

U.N. Secretary General U Thant asked Pakistan to allow relief agencies to act in East Pakistan while recognizing that the situation was Pakistan’s internal matter. In a statement to the press on 19 May by Department of State spokesperson Charles Bray, the United States welcomed the appeal issued by U Thant for assistance to help support East Pakistani refugees in India. Yahya firmly refused any outside intervention because he mistakenly believed that his counter-insurgency move was sufficient to re-establish control over the rebels.

Going against existing global current, China put itself squarely behind Yahya, the communist giant’s strong ally. On 13 April, Beijing expressed support for Yahya’s move to regain stability in East Pakistan. Chinese Premier Chou En-lai assured Yahya that should India attack Pakistan, taking advantage of its domestic woes, China stood ready to help its ally safeguard its “state sovereignty” and national independence. From April onwards, China gave Pakistan economic and military aid in line with its statement of support. China, however, quietly pressed Pakistan to settle the dispute before India’s military intervention.

Chou En-lai wrote to Yahya on 12 April, “Your Excellency and leaders of various quarters in Pakistan have done lot of useful work to uphold unification of Pakistan and to prevent it from moving towards split. We believe that through wise consultations and efforts of Your Excellency and leaders of various quarters in Pakistan, situation in Pakistan will certainly be restored to normal. In our opinion, unification of Pakistan and unity of people of East and West Pakistan are basic guarantees for Pakistan to attain prosperity and strength. Here, it is most important to differentiate broad masses of the people from a handful of persons who want to sabotage unification of Pakistan. As genuine friend[s] of Pakistan, we would like to present these views for Your Excellency’s reference. At the same time, we have noted that of late the Indian government has been carrying out gross interference in internal affairs of Pakistan by exploiting internal problems of your country. And the Soviet Union and [the] United States are doing the same one after other. The Chinese press is carrying reports to expose such unreasonable interference and has published Your Excellency’s letter of reply to Podgorny. The Chinese government holds that what is happening in Pakistan at present is purely an internal affair of Pakistan, which can only be settled by Pakistan people themselves and which brooks no foreign interference whatsoever. Your Excellency may rest assured that should Indian expansionists dare to launch aggression against Pakistan, the Chinese government and people, will, as always, firmly support Pakistan government and people in their just struggle to safeguard state sovereignty and national independence.”

### Nehru Wants Great Indian Empire

China’s opposition to Bangladesh stemmed from its strategic thinking and disdain for what it perceived was New Delhi’s ambition to create a “Mother India”. China, which has nearly intractable border disputes with its neighbor, believed that J.N. Nehru, India’s towering independence leader and first prime minister, envisioned a greater India, encompassing the entire South and Southeast Asia. His daughter – Indira Gandhi, India’s prime minister during the Bangladesh Liberation War – was made of the same mould.

“It is also a great pity that the daughter has also taken as her legacy the philosophy of her father embodied in his book, *Discovery of India*,” China’s premier told Nixon and Kissinger in March 1972 in Beijing.

Chou said Nehru “was thinking of a great Indian empire – Malaysia, Ceylon, etc. It would probably also include our Tibet. When he was writing that book he was in a British prison, but one reserved for gentlemen in Darjeeling. Nehru told me himself that the prison was in Sikkim, facing the Himalayan mountains. At the time, I hadn’t read the book, but my colleague Chen Yi had, and called it to my attention. He said it was precisely the spirit of India which was embodied.” Marshall Chen Yi, vice premier, had died of cancer before this Nixon-Chou meeting took place.

Indeed, China’s hostility towards India ranked only a little lower than that for the Soviet Union. The Chinese did not fear India per se; they worried, however, that Moscow could use India to encircle China, a fear that provoked Beijing to consistently support Pakistan’s conservative military regimes and its opposition to Bangladesh, where one would rather expect an ideological affinity.

"Since the ceasefire has gone into effect between India and Pakistan, we have carefully assessed subsequent Soviet actions and we are convinced that they intend to continue their efforts to encircle the People's Republic," Chou En-lai told Kissinger, after Pakistan lost the 1971 war, according to a memorandum of the Kissinger-Chou talks in the Chinese capital on 3 January 1972. "We say this based on a number of factors. Included among those factors are their repeatedly announced support for Bangladesh and their offer to move advisers and assistance into East Pakistan."

Because both New Delhi and Moscow had long-standing disputes with Beijing, China figured its interests would be better served by continuing to have Pakistan interposed between the Soviet Union and India. Should West Pakistan cease to exist, China would be surrounded by unfriendly neighbors. On the other hand, continuing rivalry between Pakistan and India over East Pakistan would divert New Delhi's attention away from her border with China. Thus, West Pakistan's survival was important to the communist giant.

But China's performance during the war dealt a crushing blow to its prestige in South Asia, especially amongst the pro-Chinese elements in the subcontinent. According to a CIA report, some unnamed leftist members of the Pakistan People's Party admitted the day Bhutto assumed presidency that "their image has been damaged by China's failure to come to the aid of Pakistan." Bhutto himself told the U.S. ambassador in Pakistan that unlike the United States, "China had not fulfilled its obligation to Pakistan, and he saw no need to visit Peking in the near future to discuss Pakistan's new situation."

China's opposition to Bangladesh continued even after Dhaka fell. China, which itself was kept out of the United Nations by the United States for more than two decades, blocked Bangladesh's entry into the world forum in an attempt to nudge Sheikh Mujib to free the Pakistani war prisoners. It was not until Mujib's fall in 1975 that China recognized Bangladesh. China's ambassador to Pakistan, Chang Tong, told Sidney Sober, deputy chief of the U.S. mission in Islamabad, on 6 November 1973, that Bangladesh "had no legal basis for trying those prisoners, and, indeed, their return was called for by 'justice and principle.'"

Such a step would help improve relations among the South Asian countries, pave the way for Bangladesh's entry into the world organization and China's recognition of Bangladesh, the Chinese said. He urged America to push the Bengalis to stop the war crimes trials. In short, China walked the standard Pakistani line that the POWs had been fighting on their territory under orders of their own government, so another country could not legally try them. If they had acted improperly, they would face justice in Pakistan when they returned home.

When Chang sought Sober's view, the American said the South Asians would benefit more if they looked ahead to "their future relations and needs rather than continue to look backward to the tragic events of 1971; but apparently there were deep feelings and domestic compulsions, which had been impelling the Bangladesh government to insist on the trials." Chang dismissed the theory of popular pressure on Mujib for the trials. Bangladesh, he argued, stood only to gain by giving up the trials, because not only would such a step lead to better relations with Pakistan but also would loosen the Indian and Soviet grip on Dhaka.

Only after Bangladesh signed the Simla agreement and agreed to release the POWs did China soften its position. On 14 April 1974, China's Vice Foreign Minister Ch'iao Kuan-hua told Kissinger that the tripartite pact among India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, was "a good thing".

Kissinger did not entirely agree with China about how it saw Bangladesh. "We think Bangladesh is not an Indian satellite. When relations are normal between India and Bangladesh, contradictions between them will emerge. I have also always believed that India will live to regret what it did in 1971."

When he then asked whether China intended to establish relations with Bangladesh, Vice Premier Deng Xiao Peng replied during a meeting in Beijing that "there is no obstacle to that now," adding "there have always been good relations between the peoples of Bangladesh and China." China used pro-Chinese elements to further its interests in the absence of a diplomatic mission during Mujib's rule. Several fringe Maoist political groups, which opposed Bangladesh's liberation with India's help, conducted armed operations in the country until Mujib was overthrown.

Kissinger had cautioned Nixon about China's hostile attitude towards the Mujib government after a visit to Beijing. China would "go very slowly on Bangladesh recognition, but saw advantages in our diplomatic relations so as not to leave the field free to Moscow and New Delhi," Kissinger told Nixon, quoting Chou. "In sum, I see no early change in the People's Republic of China's policy toward South Asia. The one place that will bear watching, however, is Bangladesh, where the Chinese might ferment trouble against the present rulers." China quickly moved to recognize the regime that came to power after Mujib's violent overthrow three years later.

China's support for West Pakistan continued even after the Pakistani troops capitulated in Dhaka in 1971, essentially because of Beijing's hostility towards India. When Nixon told Chou En-lai during his trip to China that America would recognize Bangladesh soon, the Chinese premier said: "We will probably recognize Bangladesh later on. Perhaps, we will be the last one." He linked China's recognition to India's withdrawal of troops stationed in Bangladesh and the resolution of the Kashmir issue. China also linked the recognition with the war prisoners' release.

Kissinger told Nixon after a visit to China that "Chou agreed with our view that an independent Pakistan should be supported against Indian pressures, absorbing New Delhi's energy in the subcontinent so it couldn't expand into Southeast Asia." He quoted Chou as saying that New Delhi was meddling in such areas as Nepal and Sri Lanka. China's premier also told Kissinger the Indians were putting out feelers for better relations, which China would ignore.

China's disdain of Nehru coincided with Nixon's own. Nixon's visceral and personal dislike of Nehru dated at least to their first meeting in 1953, when he made a twenty-minute courtesy call on the prime minister. In *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, published in 1978, Nixon wrote: "The least friendly leaders I met on this trip was Nehru," referring to the visit he undertook as Eisenhower's vice president. Nixon, however, consistently protested branding him as anti-Indian.

To be sure, Nixon was not the only one holding an unfavorable view of Nehru. Eisenhower, too, considered India's long-term leader illogical in his views. He expressed this opinion on 23 March 1955, in a letter to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles while instructing the American ambassador to India on how to deal with Nehru.

"In the Indian situation," Eisenhower wrote, "I am struck by the amount of evidence we have that Nehru seems to be often more swayed by personality than by logical argument. He seems to be intensely personal in his whole approach, and I have no doubt that the recent meeting in my office was arranged by Mr. Nehru in order that his trusted lieutenant could give him a personal appraisal of my general attitude toward the world, India and Nehru himself."

Eisenhower's comment followed his 15 March meeting with V.K. Krishna Menon, Nehru's close friend who later became defense minister. During this meeting, which Dulles attended, Menon covered various unspecified topics.

Based on his personal assessment of Nehru, Eisenhower advised Dulles to “urge our new ambassador there to do everything possible to win the personal confidence and friendship of Nehru. I think he should study thoroughly any methods and practices that have apparently been successful in the past, and we, on our part, should avoid putting chores on our ambassador that would almost compel him to show an unsympathetic attitude toward the premier. It seems to me that Cooper should be particularly fitted to do this. He has a charming wife and between them we might build up a very much better position.” John Cooper was then America’s ambassador to India.

Overall, India and the United States have had strained relations since the British era. The Indians had been suspicious of America’s motives at least since the 1940s – when Britain ruled the subcontinent. Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai, India’s agent general in Washington, explained the reason to Wallace Murray, Roosevelt’s political affairs adviser, on 24 April 1942. Bajpai made the comment while discussing why the Indian press was hostile to a U.S. technical mission, headed by Colonel Louis Johnson, sent to explore India’s industrial resources, to recommend the production of essential war materials.

He said India’s “extremely reactionary and self-seeking” industrialists had first spread rumors to discredit the mission before its arrival, saying “that American imperialism was endeavoring to replace British imperialism in India.” While they realized the Congress Party’s economic policies would hurt their interests, these industrialists still supported Congress, hoping to be able to influence its leaders after it came to power to increase tariff barriers in an independent India. An open-door policy giving the Americans an easy entry to India would be contrary to their interests.

Following the cue of the business leaders, the Indian media jumped on the bandwagon and launched an anti-American campaign, accusing the United States of intervening in the Cripps negotiations on India’s self-rule. Bajpai said that although Nehru and other Congress leaders welcomed Roosevelt’s personal envoy Johnson’s assistance during their talks with Cripps, they were careful enough to “avoid any charge by the opposition that the course of the negotiations was being dictated by” the Yankees.

Giving an insight into how Congress worked, Bajpai then explained why the Cripps mission had failed. “To my question as to whether he believed the full reason that had been set forth by the various Indian groups for the rejection of the British offer, Sir Girja replied almost emphatically in the negative,” Murray recorded in a memorandum. “Girja said he felt the reasons were ‘complete window-dressing’ and that the real reasons were unstated.”

Although Nehru and Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, a Congress Working Committee member in 1942, personally sought a successful settlement with Cripps, the committee itself “had other ideas and successfully blocked the negotiations. Once the Congress Party was unwilling to fall in line, it was a foregone conclusion that the proposals would be turned down by the other parties.”

Apparently, the talks collapsed because Britain refused to grant India self-rule as demanded by Congress. But Congress might not have accepted the plan even if London had granted self-rule. Bajpai said that some Congress members reasoned that if Britain lost the war and Japan occupied India, the Indians could negotiate a much better deal with the Japanese. Why then accept the Cripps proposals?

The Americans, however, blamed the British for the failure, saying the refusal indicated that His Majesty’s government was insincere in its promise to grant independence to India after the war. America wanted to be friendly with the Indians to neutralize their sympathy for Japan. Washington was worried that a chaotic India, with its vast population and natural resources essential to the successful operation of the war, would fall prey to Japan. This fear prompted Roosevelt in March 1942 to give a detailed outline of how the Americans developed their form of government and to propose that Britain arrange an orderly and peaceful transfer of power and let the Indians build their political system as the United States did. Both the Cripps and the Cabinet Mission proposals incorporated elements of Roosevelt’s ideas.

## KGB Spoils Gandhi With Lavish Vacation

In subsequent years, America saw many reasons to go against India, especially against Nehru. First, as the Americans saw it, Nehru put India right within Soviet orbit after Washington had bonded with Pakistan to fight communism. As a result, while Nehru condemned the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt, he kept silent when the Soviet Union crushed the Hungarian uprising. On top of this, India had opposed a U.N. resolution calling for free elections in Hungary and the withdrawal of Russian troops.

Indira Gandhi, who held fond memories of her first visit to Moscow in 1953 when she was lavishly treated by her hosts in an apparent bid to please her father, adopted a similar foreign policy line and criticized America’s Vietnam policy. That only served to infuriate Nixon.

Gandhi was overwhelmed by the attention lavished on her by the Soviet spy agency. “Everybody – the Russians – have been so sweet to me . . . I am being treated like everybody’s only daughter. I shall be horribly spoilt by the time I leave. Nobody has ever been so nice to me,” she wrote to Nehru, unaware that the entire extravaganza was arranged by the KGB, which also surrounded her with handsome, attentive male admirers, a fact she excluded from her letter, according to *The Mitrokhin Archive II: The KGB and the World*, a collection of notes made secretly by KGB archivist, Major Vasili Mitrokhin, over thirty years.

Two years later, she accompanied her father on his first official visit to the Soviet Union. Like Nehru, she was visibly impressed by the apparent successes of Soviet planning and economic modernization, exhibited to them in carefully stage-managed visits of Russian factories. During the trip, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev presented her with a mink coat, which would become one of the favorite items in her wardrobe. Only a few years earlier, she herself had criticized the female Indian ambassador in Moscow for accepting a similar gift, according to an account by Christopher Andrew, a British historian who compiled *The Mitrokhin Archive*.

To be sure, America’s opposition to India was not monolithic. An examination of its diplomatic history indicates that a succession of U.S. administrations have had a long tradition of pursuing policies that often went against the advice of their own diplomats in the field. America’s domestic politics – and an incumbent president’s personal agenda – often fed into such contradictions. Frequently, America willingly supported repressive regimes in a clandestine manner, to avoid charges of interference in the domestic and sovereign affairs of those countries. In many cases, America also shied away from getting involved to avoid risking failures for itself.

Washington, for example, balked when Johnson urged Roosevelt to help the Cripps mission and thus strengthen India’s defense against the Japanese in the Second World War. “The hour has arrived when we should consider a replanning of our policy in this section of the world,” Johnson had suggested, advocating the United States distance itself from Britain on Indian issues. “Association with the British is found to adversely affect the morale of our own officers.”

But Secretary of State Cordell Hull saw it in an entirely different manner. “An unsuccessful attempt to solve the problem along the lines you

suggest would, if we were to judge by the results of the Cripps mission, further alienate the Indian leaders and the parties from the British and cause disturbances among the various communities,” Hull told Johnson, dismissing his proposal. “On balance, I incline to the view that at the present moment the risks in the unsuccessful effort to solve the problem outweigh the advantages that might be obtained if a satisfactory solution could be found.”

Some thirty years after the Cripps mission, Washington again ignored the advice of its diplomats on the ground. Annoyed by their opposition to Washington’s policy toward the Bengalis, Nixon transferred Consul General Archer Blood from Dhaka in 1971 and banished him to a nondescript position in Washington.

Added to the often-acrimonious Indo-U.S. history were Nehru’s own troubles with America. In 1955, Nehru accused the United States of attempting to undermine his government and policies. He complained that America subsidized Indian newspapers and publishers that produced articles and books promoting U.S. foreign policy, which often ran against Nehru’s own.

“It has been clear to me since coming here that deepest disagreements between United States and the government of India lie in our foreign policy and the assumptions upon which our policy is based,” Cooper wrote to the State Department on 25 March 1955, explaining the cause of Nehru’s displeasure with Washington. “I suspect that what may be really troubling Nehru and the government of India is the thought that American officials in India are trying to convince Indians of correctness of American foreign policy and desirability of its support, which by implication suggests rejection of Nehru’s foreign policy.”

Besides the subsidy by the United States Information Service, the Americans were perhaps involved in other intelligence gathering activities, which Cooper was not fully informed about. He protested this practice in the same telegram: “It is possible that the basic question of freedom of the United States to state and interpret persuasively within India, U.S. foreign policy may have to be discussed with Pillai and Nehru. If I am to be in the strongest position to advance our views on this basic question, then I must for my own information be fully informed on any operations by the official agencies of United States other than the USIS.”

N.R. Pillai, secretary general of the India’s foreign office, specifically said the USIS paid *Pratap*, an Urdu language newspaper in New Delhi, for publishing materials supplied by the American information agency. He also told Cooper that the U.S. consul general in Bombay, William Turner, either paid, or promised to pay, *The People* newspaper.

“Nehru believed that if these charges are true, the United States is purposely trying to undermine him in India before Indian people,” Pillai told the ambassador, who denied all the allegations, saying America “did not subsidize any Indian publication or individual.”

Pillai, citing the British practice of keeping secret agencies in India without the knowledge of their own diplomats, insisted that America might be conducting clandestine operations without telling the ambassador or his colleagues about them. Two decades later, Swaran Singh raised exactly the same charge with Nixon’s Secretary of State Rogers, to support Gandhi’s allegations that the CIA sought to undermine her government.

To cool down the explosive situation, Thomas E. Flanagan, chief public affairs officer at the embassy, called for “prudence” and “restraint,” given the lingering climate of Indian suspicion and the close scrutiny of the USIS operations would likely come under in the future. He saw little to be gained by distributing anything that Nehru or his colleagues could view as critical of the prime minister himself.

## Nehru Saga Colors Nixon’s Policy

Nixon’s impressions of India under Nehru continued to color his views decades later when Nehru’s daughter, Indira Gandhi, became India’s leader. Nixon told Kissinger after Gandhi’s first official visit to Washington in 1971 that India’s future potential was dim, due to its state-controlled economy. On 2 September 1969, at a meeting of his top foreign policy aides in the Western White House in California, Nixon outlined his goals and reiterated his government’s position: “In the Pakistan/India situation, for example, Pakistan comes out way ahead in terms of likely progress, partly because India is headed down the road toward becoming a socialist state.”

In 1970, India irritated Nixon by closing down five USIS cultural centers across India after accusing the Americans of using the facilities to engage in intelligence gathering and meddling in domestic affairs. Despite Swaran Singh’s explanation that India’s decision to close the centers was part of overall efforts to establish a uniform policy regarding such posts—and was not directed against the United States – Nixon ordered the State Department to be tough on India.

In a note to Kissinger on 7 March 1970, he instructed his aide to “tell Sisco I’d like to take a stronger line on this. Not to object to the closing, but to accept it and close some other facilities, which may ‘irritate’ them a bit.”

Kaul, who had been with the foreign office since India’s Independence, himself confirmed that personal animosity between Gandhi and Nixon contributed to the souring of Indo-U.S. relations. “The prime minister hopes for good relations with the United States,” Kaul told Nixon’s successor, Gerald Ford, on 21 August 1974, in the White House. “She knows that in the past there were personal and other problems, and hopes that won’t interfere with our relations now.”

Contrasting the bitter Indo-U.S. ties, the Americans had developed a personal liking for both Ayub and Yahya. “Yahya is tough, direct and with a good sense of humor. He talks in a very clipped way, is a splendid product of Sandhurst and affects a sort of social naivete but is probably much more complicated than this,” Kissinger described in a memorandum, summarizing Nixon’s conversation with the general at the White House on 25 October 1970.

During that meeting, Nixon expressed America’s desire to establish contacts with China. The administration had been looking for an opening with China since at least a year earlier. Yahya said he had once been told to establish secret links and had communicated it to the Chinese, who wanted to know if this meant America was considering a hotline to Beijing similar to that with Moscow. Nixon said, no, that was not what he meant. He said he was willing to send ambassadors, and Yahya said he would explain this to the Chinese.

Did Yahya’s help motivate Nixon to stand solidly behind the general during the East Pakistan crisis?

There is no doubt that both Kissinger and Nixon highly appreciated Yahya’s help in their secret mission to China. In a letter to Yahya on 26 July 1971, Kissinger expressed his deep gratitude. Nixon’s obsession with his China rapprochement policy might have played a role in his South Asian strategy, but the president and Kissinger both were guided more by their geopolitical vision than by moral hazards. Anxious to woo China, they greatly appreciated Yahya’s contribution to their efforts rather than castigating him for starting a reign of terror in his country.

"I have so many reasons to thank you that it is difficult to know where to begin," Kissinger wrote. "First of all, there is the vital role that you played in establishing communications between us and the People's Republic of China. Your initiative and discretion made possible the reliable and secure contacts that led to my visit and the president's forthcoming trip."

Giving the message a personal touch, he added: "Then, the skill, tact, and efficiency with which your officials carried out my secret mission were nothing short of brilliant. I hope you will pass on my deep appreciation, and that of the president, to all those who realized this venture, including some of your closest advisers, the military personnel who paved our way to and from the airport, and the captain and crew of your airplane. My colleagues and I were greatly moved by the historic nature of our flight and the care and warmth with which we were treated as we crossed some of the world's highest mountains." Again "Mr President, the deepest thanks go to you who led and orchestrated the entire enterprise. I shall always remember your generosity in our talks on July 8 when you insisted on setting aside the massive problems that your country faces and concentrating instead on my visit to Peking. In addition, I enjoyed, and profited from, my too brief stay in Pakistan itself, the conversations we had, and the gracious Pakistani hospitality."

Nixon himself lauded Yahya's contribution in a hand-written personal letter on 7 August 1971, in which he said: "I have already expressed my official appreciation for your assistance in arranging our contacts with the People's Republic of China. Through this personal note I want you to know that without your personal assistance this profound breakthrough in relations between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China would never have been accomplished."

In general, America's policy towards South Asia, at least since the pre-Kennedy era, followed a standard pattern. Since the 1950s, American policy had been shaped by its perception that economic and social progress would produce stable democracies in recently de-colonized countries and help check communism in the third world. According to this theory, it is only the military – because of its disciplined organization – could offer the best chances at maintaining stability in newly independent countries, which often lacked strong political institutions.

"The United States objectives, especially with respect to India and Pakistan and generally with respect to other countries of South Asia, is to enhance the security of the United States," concluded a report by James S. Lay Jr, executive secretary at the State Department, to the National Security Council. The report, issued on 5 January 1951 and titled, "The Position of the United States with Respect to South Asia", also said: "The loss of India to the communist orbit would mean that for all practical purposes all of Asia will have been lost; this would constitute a most serious and threatening blow to the security of the United States . . ."

As part of this strategy to check communism, since the 1950s the United States had pursued essentially three policy objectives in South Asia: stable, strong governments friendly towards the United States in its fight against communism; greater cooperation among South Asian countries to wage a common front against communism; and the improvement of the region's basic economies.

Said a National Security Council report issued on 10 January 1957: "The political stake of the United States in the independence and integrity of the countries of South Asia, as well as in their stability and peaceful progress, is very large. If India or Pakistan came under communist influence, chain-reaction effects, going as far as Western Europe, would result. Serious political instability in either or both of these large nations would significantly increase communist influence in the area or, alternatively, might lead to hostilities in South Asia. Either turn of events could engage great power interests to the point of threatening world peace.

It continued: "It remains necessary, therefore, to employ the limited means at our disposal as effectively as possible in South Asia. This will require policies developed country by country, but it will also continue to involve us in intraregional issues and we shall probably find it increasingly necessary that we seek to resolve, or at least to keep under control, the local controversies that bulk so importantly in the political life of the subcontinent."

This document followed an intelligence analysis released on 15 March 1955, which predicted probable developments in Pakistan over the next several years, with an emphasis on its economic prospects and likely political stability. It followed more than two years of recurrent political crises and takeover of political power in Pakistan by a small group of British-trained administrators and military leaders centering around Governor General Ghulam Mohammed and his two principal associates, General Iskander Mirza and General Ayub Khan. The Pakistani regime favored a strong central government, economic development through austerity measures and foreign aid, and close alignment with the United States.

The intelligence report said: "We believe that the present regime will remain in power at least through 1955 and probably considerably longer. Its firm control of the armed forces will almost certainly enable it to discourage, or if need be defeat, any attempt to challenge it, and it is unlikely to allow itself to be ousted by political maneuvering or legal challenges to its authority. Although East Pakistani provincialism will continue to pose serious problems, we do not believe that separatism will become a major threat."

At least for several years, however, the regime would probably be handicapped by a lack of organized political and popular support and, even more importantly, by the thinness of its top leadership. Moreover, within the ruling group there were differences of view which could become serious. Ghulam Mohammed was seriously ill at that time and his death, while not expected to automatically lead to the regime's fall, was expected to severely test Mirza and Ayub's ability to keep their associates in line and their opponents under control. The eventuality was seen as a probable compulsion for them to rely more openly on the armed forces.

The report concluded: "Should Mirza and Ayub, in turn, be removed from the scene, a many-sided struggle would probably follow. This might give rise to another, basically similar, authoritarian regime or it might result in serious internal disorganization and perhaps a weakening of Pakistan's present alignment with the United States.

"Under the present or any similar regime, Pakistan will almost certainly continue to cultivate close ties with the United States, if only because of Pakistan's urgent need for U.S. economic assistance and its desire for U.S. military and diplomatic support to strengthen its position against India. Pakistan's present regime will probably cooperate with U.S. efforts in the further development of anti-communist defense arrangements in both the Middle East and Southeast Asia. It is not likely, however, to commit any more than token forces outside the Pakistan territory unless its armed forces are considerably strengthened, its economy improved and its fear of India greatly reduced. In the event of a general war, Pakistan would recognize that its interest and obligations lay with the West, but unless directly threatened, it would probably seek specific Western protection before overtly departing from nonbelligerence."

Pakistan's strong military was among the reasons why American policymakers sought an alliance with Islamabad. Admiral Arthur Radford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, revealed his preference during a Joint Chiefs discussion in 14 January 1955, after a trip to Pakistan. He had stayed with Governor General Mohammed Ali in Karachi, but hardly saw him, because the Pakistani leader was ill. Mirza, the admiral understood,

was the No. 2 strongman, but he thought the best man was still Ayub.

John D. Jernegan, deputy secretary of state for the Near East, offered a different viewpoint. He did not know Mirza, but said State Department specialists thought that Mirza, who definitely expected to be prime minister one day, was more competent than Ayub.

The admiral replied that such might very well be, but as far as honesty and directness were concerned, Mirza was no match for Ayub. Further discussion prompted the admiral to recount that during the recent government crisis in Pakistan involving Prime Minister Mohammed Ali, Ghulam Mohammad wanted to name Ayub as prime minister, but Ayub himself persuaded the governor general to keep Ali in place. Jernegan said that both Ayub and Mirza had persuaded the governor general to keep Ali.

Commenting further, Radford said that "Ali was not the man we would want to have stay in ..." He emphasized that Pakistan was a potential ally of great importance and that from the military point of view, it had "a trained armed force which no other friendly power can match, not even the Turks."

Nixon explained his rationale for supporting Pakistan against India during a conversation with Rogers on 24 November 1971. He compared India's move into East Pakistan with North Vietnam's support for South Vietnam, because New Delhi denied that it was actively aiding the Bengali insurgents, as did Hanoi. Nixon, however, was convinced that "the Indians are going to win" and that "Pakistan will eventually disintegrate."

"They want Pakistan to disintegrate," Nixon said, referring to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. "Despite what she says that's what she wants, there's no question about that. Now under those circumstances, it seems to me that the fact that Yahya has been more decent to us than she has been; clearly apart from that, I think that our policy wherever we can should definitely be tilted toward Pakistan, and not toward India. I think India is more at fault."

## **Nixon Sees Strong India Will Hurt U.S. Interests**

America's strategy contained an element of curbing India's regional influence. Nixon feared that if India broke Pakistan and emerged as South Asia's most dominant power, it would have an adverse effect on America's interests. Nixon and Kissinger were also wary of another brewing threat from the Soviet military and its moral support for India. An Indian victory would only boost India's prestige and tip the global power balance, away from America and in Moscow's favor. To prevent such an outcome, with their frantic efforts, combined with scarcely veiled threats, they sought to stop Pakistan's total meltdown, to thwart what they thought was a sinister Indo-Soviet scheme.

On 22 June 1972, Kissinger told the Chinese prime minister that "as far as we are concerned, we would also look with disfavor on an attempt by India to establish hegemony in that area." He prefaced his statement by saying that India was pursuing "an aggressive foreign policy", which in essence was an extension of the Soviet geopolitical strategy. By way of illustration, Kissinger noted that India had offered to both Indonesia and Japan, drafts of treaties that were "word for word the same as its own treaties with the Soviet Union".

He agreed with the Chinese that India's ability to pursue hegemony in Asia depended to some extent on its ability to gain freedom of action on the subcontinent. "We believe that the strategy of India is to do to West Pakistan what it has already done to East Pakistan by disintegrating it, by bringing about the secession of Northwest Frontier and Baluchistan."

He recalled that when Gandhi visited Washington in 1971 she did not talk much about East Pakistan. Instead she talked about the betrayal involved in West Pakistan – the inclusion of Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier in the Islamic nation. Therefore, the problem was whether it was possible to save West Pakistan and thus absorb some of India's energies on the subcontinent rather than free them all for expansion. "I'm saying this cold-bloodedly; it's our analysis," Kissinger said.

To some extent, Nixon's steps in 1971 followed a familiar path treaded by previous U.S. administrations. In 1965, for example, when the Johnson administration dealt with the war between India and Pakistan, it simply decided to cut off military aid to both nations. Nixon did exactly the same six years later. The only difference between 1965 and 1971 was that in Johnson's time, Pakistan succumbed to U.S. pressure when the president asked Ayub not to encourage China to get involved in that war. On the other hand, when Nixon urged Gandhi not to interfere in East Pakistan, she simply ignored him.

Nixon also carried forward the Eisenhower administration views that America's interests were better served "by a unified Pakistan." When Yahya told the U.S. ambassador in 1971 that he worried Pakistan's two wings might split up, Farland reassured him that America continued to support Pakistan's unity.

"I recalled that I had carefully explained to him during our first meeting that it was the policy of the United States to respect the unity and integrity of Pakistan, and that I had publicly reiterated this policy on every occasion," the ambassador informed the State Department in a cable on 1 February 1971.

Farland told Yahya that any propaganda to the contrary had been spread by those who disliked better ties between the United States and Pakistan. He asserted that whatever rumor that the United States was covertly attempting to divide the two wings "was not only false and fallacious, but that it was contrary to the most elementary political or military judgments."

"Further, to believe that the United States sought or desired another underdeveloped country in Southeast Asia could be deemed ludicrous were it not for the fact that such a posture had been given credence in the press and unfortunately was believed in many places of high political importance," Farland also told Yahya.

Farland's assurance was merely a renewal of a strong commitment Nixon had made a year earlier, when Yahya visited Washington in October 1970. At that time, Nixon told him, "Nobody has occupied the White House who is friendlier to Pakistan."

All the key U.S. officials – Nixon, Kissinger, and Rogers – blamed India for the war to justify their support for Pakistan. Rogers told a National Security Council meeting on 6 December 1971, that "the conflict was obviously the result of a carefully worked out plan designed by the Indians some time ago." Kissinger added that despite giving an appearance that "the Indians were practising restraint, but it was obvious now that they moved as early as they could." India had waited for the monsoon to be over, the passes from China to be closed by snow and the Bengali guerrillas to be trained before making the move. "All was completed as Prime Minister Gandhi traveled abroad," Kissinger said. Nixon summed up: "The Indians had long wanted to hurt Pakistan. Their interests involved Kashmir more than East Pakistan."

Nixon continued his hard-line policy towards India even after the war had ended as part of his decision to punish Gandhi for her anti-U.S.



statements, especially on the Vietnam issue. On 24 June 1972, he instructed his former Treasury Secretary John Connally, who was sent on a diplomatic mission by the president after he quit his cabinet post, to be tough in his talks in New Delhi.

"I would like to emphasize that it is essential that you take the strongest stand on this issue and would like to reemphasize the importance I attach to your maintaining the toughest and most aloof demeanor during your Indian leg in the face of these Indian attacks," Nixon advised his emissary. "The Indian press is suggesting that your visit to Delhi is associated with an effort by me to admit past mistakes in our policy towards India as part of an apologetic move to re-establish better relations. Thus, it is essential that you not contribute to this impression, which can only invite further Indian insolence. It is also essential to our strategy vis-à-vis Hanoi and other countries that we in no way contribute to the impression that we are buttering up a state, which has been in the forefront of vitriolic attack against my recent Vietnam decisions. You should make it very clear from the outset that the United States cannot accept continuing anti-U.S. attacks whether they involve the conflict in Southeast Asia or some other aspects of U.S. policy. I know I can count on you to ensure that this climate is clearly established during your stay in India."

The Nixon White House saw the South Asian crisis from a much wider perspective, as revealed in a 9 December 1971 conversation between the president and his aide. In the Oval Office meeting, Kissinger repeated his warning of the dangers he saw if India dismembered Pakistan: The impact of a U.S. ally's dismemberment would "be severe in Iran, in Indonesia and in the Middle East."

Referring to the ongoing war between India and Pakistan, he said "there is no good deal possible any more at this stage. And, if the Russians want to press it to a brutal conclusion, we're going to lose." He saw possibilities, however, in the "conciliatory" letter from Brezhnev. The Soviets wanted a Middle East settlement, a European security conference, trade with the United States, and a summit meeting. Also, the Russians possibly did not want to push the United States and China closer together.

"So we are not without assets," Kissinger added.

To scare the Indo-Soviet axis, Kissinger told Nixon that America could "warn the Russians and the Indians that ... Kennedy made a commitment to Pakistan against aggression from India." "Secondly," he added, "we should move that helicopter ship and some escort into the Bay of Bengal," ostensibly to evacuate the Americans. He was not, at this point, recommending introduction of the carrier. "From the Chinese angle, I would like to move the carrier. From the public opinion angle, what the press and television would do to us if an American carrier showed up there."

Nixon asked: "Can't the carrier be there for the purpose of evacuation?"

Kissinger: "But against whom are we going to use the planes? Are we going to shoot our way in?"

Nixon asked what good it would do to move a helicopter ship into the area.

Kissinger said it would be "a token that something else will come afterward." He also recommended letting "the Jordanians move some of their planes. And I'd get the Indian Ambassador in and demand assurances that India doesn't want to annex territory."

Kissinger again highlighted the differing approaches to the crisis adopted by the State Department and the White House. The department, he said, "would propose a ceasefire in the West in return for in effect our recognition of Bangladesh." Such an approach would constitute "a total collapse" and "it would hurt us with the Chinese."

Nixon, however, saw the need to take into account the situation's "realities." "Pakistan's partition was a fact," he said. "You see those people welcoming the Indian troops when they come in." "Why then," he asked, "are we going through all of this agony?"

Kissinger replied: "We are going through this agony to prevent the West Pakistan army from being destroyed. And secondly, to retain our Chinese arm. And thirdly, to prevent a complete collapse of the world's psychological balance of power, which will be produced if a combination of the Soviet Union and the Soviet armed client state can tackle a not insignificant country without anybody doing anything."

Kissinger felt that if the United States would "put enough chips into the pot" it could persuade the Soviets "for their own reasons, for the other considerations, to call a halt to it."

Nixon asked: "What are we going to ask the Russians to do?" Kissinger: "Ceasefire, negotiation and subsequent withdrawal." He added: "But we'd have to clear it with Yahya first."

Nixon: "Ceasefire and negotiation on what basis?"

Kissinger: "Between the Awami League and Islamabad." He added "on the basis of the December 1970 election," and "within the framework of a united Pakistan." Withdrawal, he said, would occur after the negotiations.

When Nixon asked what the United States could do to influence the outcome, Kissinger replied: "I would keep open the possibility that we'll pour arms into Pakistan." If the Soviet Union could ship arms to India, Kissinger said, why should the United States not do the same to Pakistan?

"I don't understand the theory of noninvolvement," he said. "I don't see where we will be as a country. I have to tell you honestly I consider this our Rhineland." He warned: "If the Russians come out of it totally cocky, we may have a Middle East war in the spring."

But Nixon was concerned about the implications of taking a hard line. "We have to know what we are jeopardizing," he said.

Kissinger responded: "You are jeopardizing your relationship with the Soviets, but that is also your card, your willingness to jeopardize it." Not to play that card, Kissinger suggested, would be to concede the Soviet Union a dangerous victory.

Nixon said opponents of his South Asian policy worried about jeopardizing Indo-U.S. relations.

Kissinger: "You could argue that it will help us in the long term with the Indians."

Nixon: "I don't give a damn about the Indians."

Kissinger later sought to smooth out the rough edges of Indo-U.S. relations caused by America's support for Pakistan. On 15 April 1974, he told Swaran Singh, "Whatever our views in 1971 were, now that Bangladesh is independent we want it to be stable. In any case, our position in 1971 had nothing to do with India or Bangladesh. It was affected by our opening to China and our relationship with the USSR."

Singh had a different issue on his mind. "We also have information that the Chinese are keen to come to Bangladesh soon. We assume that they will use the internal situation for their own advantage," he told Kissinger.

Kissinger: "I have the same impression. They talk in terms of the closeness of the Bangladesh and the Chinese people."

Singh: "They have some people who will be quite active there. They will use their presence there to generate anti-Indian acts. But we will have to live with that problem. We are neighbors of China, and there is nothing we can do with the fact that they are there and will be active in their own

neighborhood. In any case, American and Indian interests and objectives are the same.”

Kissinger: “Yes. They are parallel. We want a stable, progressive and democratic Bangladesh. There is no need for us to fight again the problems of two years ago. They had nothing to do with Bangladesh.”

Nixon and Kissinger obviously also believed that the Soviet Union, with its then newly signed friendship treaty with India, was well entrenched in New Delhi; an even-handed policy not tilted towards Pakistan would not have changed the basic fact of the Soviet arms aid to India. On the contrary, a pro-Indian policy would have antagonized both Islamabad and Beijing. Thus, apparently afraid that the president’s Beijing mission might be jeopardized, the administration favored Pakistan over India.

However, Nixon’s desire to forge a relationship with China – an apparent objective Kissinger had outlined to the president’s foreign policy team before the war – possibly had little direct impact on America’s support for Pakistan in 1971. Kissinger himself dismissed the notion that Pakistan received continued U.S. military aid because it helped Washington build ties with China. When Saunders asked on 17 July whether Kissinger agreed the State Department should not link military assistance with the China policy, the national security adviser replied in the affirmative.

An opportunity for America to warm up to China had existed at least since General Ayub Khan became Pakistan’s president and his foreign minister, Z.A. Bhutto, wooed Beijing to play the China card to extract more concessions from Washington.

During a conversation on 18 September 1964, with Walter P. McCaughy, then the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, Ayub suggested that “some U.S.-Chinese communist relations would have to be established.” When the envoy replied that there would first have to be some changes made in China, Ayub “heartily concurred, but noted there would need to be some adjustments of view in Washington, also.”

From the Chinese side, Beijing had extended an olive branch to Washington as far back as in 1965. Chou En-lai had asked Ayub Khan, when he visited Beijing in March of that year, to give a message to Washington that the communist nation would not “provoke war with the United States” unless America bombed China first. But because Ayub’s visit to the United States had been postponed, China worried its message was probably not delivered. Foreign Minister Ch’en Yi thus asked the British Embassy in Beijing if it would pass on the message.

The British Embassy sent two messages to London on 31 May and 1 June 1965. Copies of the telegrams were sent to William P. Bundy, assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs in the Johnson administration, with a 2 June cover note by Michael N.F. Stewart, a minister at the British Embassy in China. Stewart asked London whether the United States would object if the British charge told the Chinese that the British had delivered the message to Washington. No reply to this note had ever been found.

Ayub told the U.S. ambassador during a meeting on 18 September 1965, that “some useful information and some Pak leverage on Chinese communists might be developed out of Pak associations with Chinese communists.” He made the remark when McCaughy chided Pakistan for warming up to China.

America, then, not only opposed direct contacts with Beijing, but also put pressure on Pakistan not to forge strong ties with China because the communist giant supported Vietnam. Not only that, America pressed Ayub to remove his Yankee-baiting foreign minister, Bhutto, the architect of Sino-Pak amity, from his cabinet. Ironically, it was Bhutto whom Nixon later courted to make America’s opening to China. Soon after Nixon was elected president in November 1968, Dr. Glenn Olds, who became the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Economic and Social Council under Nixon, traveled to Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, to meet with Bhutto, who was cordial with Chou En-lai. Olds traveled on Nixon’s behalf to ask Bhutto to intercede with China. The meeting marked America’s first step in the normalization of relations with China. Olds’ strategy proposed that Bhutto be the intermediary to Mao through Chou En-lai, wrote Jeff Gates, author of the 2008 book, *Guilt By Association*, in an article in Salem-News.com on 18 December 2009.

Yahya’s role as an intermediary between America and China was merely an extension of the trend going back to the Ayub era. The secret diplomacy, however, assumed greater importance because Nixon was eager to break the barriers of China’s Great Wall.

During the 1971 crisis, Kissinger did emphasize the Nixon administration’s aim to stop war in South Asia, because “we do not want to be forced to choose between 800 million Chinese and 600 million Indians and Bengalis. We don’t want India in the Soviet camp, even though the Indians may be driving themselves there deliberately through the creation of a phony crisis.”

However, putting the blame squarely on Nixon’s China overture for the anti-India posture was perhaps an attempt by Kissinger to absolve himself as well as the administration of the responsibility for pursuing a discredited policy. Kissinger claimed, “Pakistan was our sole channel to China; once it was closed off it would take months to make alternative arrangements.” But America had already established an alternate channel via Eastern Europe. The more serious charge against Nixon’s actions was that his pro-Pakistan policy possibly encouraged the war. For instance, the Indians were infuriated because America failed to protest Mujib’s imprisonment and never openly rebuked Pakistan’s repression in East Pakistan. A neutral stance by Nixon – rather than branding India as the aggressor – would not necessarily have doomed his China initiative. Perhaps, it could have reduced Soviet influence in India, which had been America’s principal goal in South Asia since the 1950s. But Nixon’s policy did just the opposite. Gandhi, who had been lukewarm to the idea of a pact with Moscow, rushed to sign the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty as soon as she learned of Nixon’s secret China plan.

## Yahya's Misadventure: Dark Clouds Over Pakistan

On 6 April, the day the U.S. consulate general in Dhaka dispatched the dissent cable, the American Embassy in Islamabad also sent a telegram to Washington, commenting on a letter Yahya had written to Nixon seeking help against India's possible intervention in East Pakistan.

Yahya's letter followed a plea by Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Sultan Khan for a public statement by America against any attempt to "internationalize" the East Pakistan issue.

Farland, the U.S. ambassador in Pakistan, had recommended that Washington accommodate Khan's request. But he no longer saw any need for such a statement because of India's assurance that it would not interfere in East Pakistan. "I will not press our recommendation further," Farland wrote on 10 April, noting that India's assurance had made his earlier suggestion, mute.

India gave the assurance when the U.S. ambassador to India, Kenneth Keating, met with Foreign Secretary T.N. Kaul. On 2 April, Keating told Washington that Kaul had assured him India did not intend to interfere in Pakistan's internal affairs. Keating had also reviewed Indian military dispositions and concluded the Indian army was not oriented against East Pakistan.

Keating opposed the initiative proposed by Yahya – to issue a public warning against India: "Given Indian military dispositions and positive statements of responsible Indian officials I believe there should be no question of *démarche* to the government of India along lines suggested by President Yahya in his last letter."

Despite Farland's decision to go back on the earlier recommendation, he still wanted Washington to let New Delhi know about its opposition to India's possible interference in Pakistan, but privately.

"Since our position against intervention has been made clear to [the government of India], we have, in effect, already, albeit privately, responded to Yahya's request," he wrote. "Nonetheless, given what intelligence sources have reported about covert Indian activity, this mission believes the department, on an early occasion and at an appropriately high level, should underscore our strong feeling that no outside power should take any steps that would tend to broaden and escalate the conflict."

Giving his outlook as to how the situation would evolve, Farland wrote: "As we have previously reported, we do not believe the army over the long run can hold the East by bayonet against the overwhelming opposition of the Bengalis. I think Yahya's action against the Awami League is a self-defeating step."

Six days after Farland first voiced his concern over the East Pakistan situation, he sent yet another note to Washington, making a comment on a 7 April conversation between Sisco and Pakistan's Ambassador Agha Hilaly.

Hilaly sounded optimistic about a political solution in East Pakistan. He said Yahya would concede the Awami League's six-point agenda, with minor adjustments. Yahya had already reiterated his plan to transfer power to a provincial government in East Pakistan. Hilaly, who speculated the change would happen in months, did not feel that Mujib's arrest or the Awami League's banning would have any substantial effect on the political outcome in East Pakistan.

Farland's assessment, however, painted a bleak picture. He wrote that two weeks after Pakistan launched a crackdown, the military controlled only major cities in East Pakistan. "But the Bengalis still hold major areas, especially in the countryside." If the resistance continued on to June when monsoon begins, the military "will face major logistical and operational difficulties." However, if the resistance crumbled in the next two months, the military should control the province, at least for the short, and possibly, medium-term.

### U.S. Ambassador Doubts Pakistan's Survival

Over the long term, Farland continued, Pakistan would be unable to hold East Pakistan. In time, renewed resistance would possibly emerge, "because the breach between the two wings was too deep to permit reconciliation."

"In short," he commented, "we believe the Hilaly prognosis, as would be expected, is overly optimistic," reflecting the official Pakistan government line rather than the current unclear situation on the ground.

He explained that the operation in East Pakistan had not been a breeze as expected by the Pakistani military leadership. Mujib's supporters still held major parts of the countryside.

Farland questioned whether the army's control extended beyond the cities, and also wondered if the army would succeed in breaking the back of organized Bengali resistance. For the moment, Awami Leaguers apparently rallied the Bengali nationalists in the western half of East Pakistan. He expressed doubt that Pakistan could regain of the Bengalis' loyalty.

"Hilaly was wrong on this fundamental point," Farland flatly declared.

He said that the events of the past two weeks had left such severe emotional scars that it was hard to conceive that there was anything Pakistan could do to make most of the Bengalis willing citizens of Pakistan.

"Bengali grievances are now etched in blood," the ambassador observed.

Even if West Pakistan won the short-term victory, he continued, the Bengali resistance movement was likely to be revived eventually. In the early stages, such activity might consist of random acts of terror and harassment of the Pakistani troops. However, the movement was likely to gain momentum. If the Awami League movement crumbled before it consolidated its position on the ground, the resistance movement was likely to pass on to more radical and left extremist groups, such as the Naxalites in India.

"Our prognosis regarding West Pakistan's prospects for holding the East remains unchanged from the views expressed previously. Even if the army is able to crush the current resistance, we continue to believe the military cannot maintain control over the long-term. Regardless of the short-term developments, in time the West Pakistan military is likely to become bogged down in hopeless morass. Yahya's military intervention on March 26, however justified from his standpoint, probably ensures the very thing which the move was designed to prevent – the disintegration of Pakistan," Farland predicted.

In Washington, the CIA agreed with Farland's prognosis about East Pakistan.

During a meeting on 9 April of the Senior Review Group in Washington, when Kissinger asked for a review of the Pakistan situation, CIA Deputy Director Cushman said the Bengali resistance could turn radical. The Chinese communists – the Naxalites in West Bengal – could take over. He also said India might arm the Bengalis: "India has publicly stated they favor the Bengalis. Although they deny any intervention, they are probably sending in arms."

Kissinger then asked why India would arm the Bengalis. To which Cushman replied: "They think that anything that makes trouble for Pakistan is in their interests."

John N. Irwin III, under secretary of state, elaborated on the scenario: "They also fear that, if they don't intervene, the Naxalites will make trouble for them"

Kissinger speculated the trouble in East Pakistan would fuel separatist feelings in West Bengal.

Cushman, for his part, said India would prefer to see an independent Bengali state.

And Irwin, meanwhile, noted that before the trouble started, India had preferred a unified Pakistan.

Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, who became chairman of the Joint Chief after July 1970, then joined the exchange. "I have just come from a CENTO military meeting and had long conversations with the Pakistani and Iranian military representatives. There is no question in their minds that the Indians would like to see an independent East Pakistan."

Kissinger asked if the Pakistani and Iranian military representatives thought Pakistan could win with 30,000 soldiers.

Moorer replied, "Yes."

Cushman was, however, skeptical and said, "We believe the actions of the West Pakistan army have made the breakup more certain. There is a psychological rift now and we don't think they can really bring the country back under West Pakistan control, particularly if the Indians supply arms."

Sisco, the assistant secretary of state, shared his recent discussion with Hilaly, who had indicated that Yahya would accept Mujib's six points with some modifications.

"If this is true, Yahya will give them substantial autonomy. Our people believe this is too little too late, and that the likelihood of a united country is not too great," Sisco said.

Sisco added, "I think it is likely, however, that East Pakistan will end in some form of separatism. Our job is to maintain reasonable relations with both wings. As we view the subcontinent, in terms of our relative interest, our interest in India is probably greater than our interest in Pakistan, although not in absolute terms."

Kissinger wondered why Yahya would resort to military action if he indeed wanted to eventually concede the Awami League's six points.

David Blee, head of the CIA's Soviet division, surmised the army had misjudged its ability to quickly subdue East Pakistan.

Before concluding the meeting, Kissinger sought a vote on Sisco's assessment. "Does everyone agree with this analysis? Is there anyone that believes West Pakistan can re-establish complete control over the country?" he asked.

No one present there thought so.

The panel then moved on to a closed-door session at a CIA member's request. Kissinger, Irwin, Moorer, Cushman, Warren Nutter, assistant defense secretary; Sisco, Blee, and Saunders attended the session.

Cushman told the group the CIA had received a request to provide "unmarked small arms to the 'freedom fighters' in East Pakistan." He said the intelligence agency had a "secure channel through which it could deliver such weapons, but that his personal opinion was that this operation would not remain secret much beyond that. He said CIA Director Richard Helms opposed the project. He did not identify who made the request, but Sisco's comments later indicated it came from India.

When Kissinger sought the group's opinion on the idea, Irwin opposed it.

Moorer said it would be "very wrong" to work on both sides of the East Pakistani issue at once.

Kissinger said Nixon "would never approve this project".

Sisco felt the Indians were testing Washington. It was one thing for America to close its eyes to reports of clandestine Indian support for the East Pakistani resistance movement but quite another thing to collude with India in this supply.

India's proposal to arm the guerrillas was intended to stop the leftists from controlling the resistance. But Blee doubted the supply of small arms would achieve that goal. He said the leftists would win out.

Kissinger described Blee's comment as a serious judgment, which must be taken into consideration when deciding the future course of action. "If we feel that, under present circumstances, the radicals are likely to take over, that could affect our judgment about the necessity of bringing the civil war to an end."

If the United States had been presented with a choice on 25 March, Kissinger continued, it would certainly have urged Yahya against military action. He said everyone had been taken by surprise when the Mujib-Yahya talks broke down and Yahya turned to military action.

Sisco said America and Yahya both had a big stake in putting in power a moderate leadership in East Pakistan. He privately told Hilaly that Pakistan had an interest in allowing those whom it had jailed to play a role in establishing a moderate leadership in East Pakistan.

Responding to a question from Kissinger, Sisco said the CIA, much earlier than the State Department, had indicated Yahya might take military action. State Department officials had been much more inclined to see a negotiated settlement and, therefore, had worried less about this issue before 25 March.

On the morning of 12 April, Nixon met in the Oval Office with Kissinger and H. R. Haldeman, the White House chief of staff, to discuss the developments in Pakistan. Both Nixon and Kissinger worried the United States could become involved in Pakistan's civil war.

Kissinger said that if America supported the insurgents, "we get West Pakistan turned against us, and ... the Bengalis are going to go left anyway."

Nixon agreed: "If we get in the middle of that thing it would be a hell of a mistake." In an oblique reference to India, he said: "The people who bitch about Vietnam, bitch about it because we intervened in what they say is a civil war. Now some of those same bastards ... want us to intervene here – both civil wars."

Kissinger said India wanted the U.S. involvement "because they are scared to death of their own Bengalis. Deep down, the Indians don't really want an independent East Pakistan because within ten years of that the West Bengalis are going to start bringing pressure on them for autonomy."

As things turned out, Kissinger could not have made a more fatal miscalculation.

## Did India Plan to Break Pakistan?

On 15 March, ten days before Pakistan unleashed the power of its army to restore control over East Pakistan – and when the Yahya-Mujib talks still held promise – L.K. Jha, India's ambassador to Washington, told Kissinger that his government preferred Pakistan's unity.

The U.S. Embassy in New Delhi sent a telegram to Washington on 27 March with a similar message, describing India's reaction to Pakistan's repression in East Bengal. It was based on the American ambassador's discussion with the Indian officials. India's Foreign Secretary T.N. Kaul had called Keating to the foreign office to discuss the situation.

Kaul started by giving the U.S. diplomat a copy of External Affairs Minister Swaran Singh's statement in Lok Sabha earlier in the day. Singh had accused Pakistan's army of suppressing the Bengalis. Kaul said Singh faced criticism from members of all parties who described his statement as "too cold." Singh had to intervene and state that there was no doubt that India's sympathy was with the people of East Pakistan.

India was deeply concerned at the developments. It felt that Yahya's talks in March with Mujib to reach a settlement had been nothing more than a facade to allow time for the transport of additional troops to East Pakistan. Kaul said India was concerned about its own borders, because New Delhi saw a threat to its security and expected an influx of refugees. Kaul hoped there would not be any outside intervention by any country, an indirect reference to China. Perhaps, even at this late hour, it might still not be too late for Washington to express to Pakistan "our hope that a political solution can be reached".

With this note, he requested that the United States exchange with India any information it might get on the situation, and told the envoy there had been rumors of a possible Chinese intervention, a statement possibly intended to win America's sympathy. The communist nation, he continued, would certainly feel that it was in its interest to support West Pakistan. Some evidence suggested that Beijing had authorized Pakistan overflights over Kashmir, Tibet and Burma, to East Pakistan.

### China Opposes Pro-India Mujib

Kaul said that the Chinese had at least an understanding with Yahya, but they did not like Mujib because he was considered to be pro-Western and pro-Indian. Mujib had the upper hand over extremist elements in East Pakistan headed by Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani. However, Kaul said, with Mujib in custody, the Chinese might try to fish in troubled waters, with the help of hardcore Naxalites in East Pakistan.

New Delhi faced considerable public pressure to intervene as the news of the repression in East Pakistan spread in India. On 29 March 1971, India's parliament passed a resolution, pledging support for the Bengalis in their struggle for the transfer of power to their legally elected representatives. Lok Sabha expressed confidence that "the historic upsurge of 75 million people of East Bengal will triumph."

While the resolution supported the "struggle for the transfer of power", but not armed resistance nor self-rule, it signaled a change in India's policy towards Pakistan. Previously, India respected Pakistan's integrity to protect its own unity, which had been threatened by regional factions and demands for autonomy.

India's support to the Bengali rebels initially consisted of assisting voluntary efforts and of encouraging the escaped Awami League leaders to form a provisional government. India, however, withheld the formal recognition of this government-in-exile. These cautious actions resulted in military advice that India would be unprepared for military action until the monsoon season ended in September.

India's initial reluctance to break Pakistan also had something to do with its fear that an independent East Bengal could pose a serious threat to West Bengal, where a strong-armed communist insurrection was wreaking havoc. India was concerned China would side with Pakistan if a conflict broke out. India also feared that Beijing, which claims part of eastern India as its land, could switch sides from West Pakistan and support a united Bengal movement. A successful outcome of such a campaign with China's support would mean India would find itself surrounded by hostile neighbours on all sides. On top of all this, India feared separatist movements along its eastern frontiers could find encouragement if the Bengalis won independence.

India's fear of China's influence in Bangladesh persisted even after the war. Soon after the Mujib government fell in 1975 and Beijing extended recognition to the Moshtaque administration, Indira Gandhi's private secretary, P.N. Dhar, expressed concern to Adolph Dubs, deputy assistant secretary of state, in New Delhi, on 21 October. Dhar could foresee "a potential problem in which the Chinese would establish an influential position with a leftist regime in Bangladesh and threaten the stability in West Bengal and the tribal areas of northeastern India." No doubt Dhar's statement was somewhat intended to curry favor with Washington, which sought allies in its fight against communism.

To preempt the possible Chinese hold on Bengal, New Delhi adopted a cautious posture towards the Bengali resistance. India initially decided its prudent course was to force Pakistan to restore normalcy in the East Pakistan to stop the influx of refugees and the return of those who had already crossed over into India.

As time went by and millions of refugees poured into India, New Delhi realized it faced a more serious issue than it had initially thought. India's leaders discovered that most of the traumatized refugees were Hindus, who had been systematically targeted for elimination after the military began the campaign in Dhaka. The Hindus – estimated by the State Department to be around 80 percent of the ten million displaced people – would not return to East Pakistan unless the Awami League came to power, the party the Hindus overwhelmingly supported for its secular politics. This resulted in New Delhi's reassessment of its initial stance and making a demand that Yahya reach a political accommodation with the Awami League.

Within months after the Bangladesh government-in-exile was formed, India saw two trends emerging within the Bangladesh movement: the Awami League leadership had factions and the Bengali guerrillas had begun going left – some worrisome factors for India's leaders to grapple with.

## Secret China Plan Makes Gandhi Nervous

On top of all this, India got nervous after it learned from Kissinger about Nixon's secret overture to Beijing. Gandhi countered America's move by hurriedly signing a pact with Moscow – a strategic milestone that made India confident of a favorable outcome in a future war against Pakistan. With India's diplomatic offensive over East Pakistan gaining traction internationally, New Delhi got down to rethinking its strategic move, ultimately deciding to end the East Pakistan crisis through military intervention.

On 9 April 1971, following a Senior Review Group meeting on Sri Lanka and Pakistan, the panel moved into an executive session at the request of the CIA member. CIA's Deputy Director Cushman began by summarizing a request from an undisclosed party that had been circulated in a short memo before the meeting. Some analysts speculated the undisclosed party was India, which asked the intelligence agency to supply unmarked small arms to what it called "freedom fighters" in East Pakistan.

Cushman remarked that the CIA had a secure channel through which it could deliver such weapons but that his personal opinion was that this operation would not remain secret much beyond that. He noted that his boss did not favor the project.

In response to Kissinger's query, Irwin said he was "reluctant" to provide arms. Joint Chiefs Chairman Admiral Moorer felt that it would be "very wrong" to be working on both sides of the East Pakistani issue at once. Cushman also felt that an affirmative response would pre-judge the larger policy issue that the Senior Review Group had been discussing.

Kissinger summarized by saying that he felt that Nixon would never approve this project. Sisco said that he felt the Indians were "testing us." It was one thing, he noted, for the United States to close its eyes to the reports of clandestine Indian support for the East Pakistani resistance movement, but quite another thing for America to collude with the Indians in this supply.

Kissinger stated his assumption that the United States could not, in any case, deliver enough equipment to make a difference to the outcome in East Pakistan. Moreover, he assumed that the Indians would have sufficient stock to supply any small arms that might be needed.

Blee said that the Indians lacked a large enough quantity of unmarked, unattributable weapons to supply what the East Pakistanis needed, in the quantities they needed, so there would be a need if someone wanted this done. On the other hand, he did not see how Indian supply could make a difference in the outcome of the contest between the leftists and the moderates to gain control over the East Pakistani nationalist movement. He felt that it was a foregone conclusion that the leftists would win out. That was a very serious judgment, Kissinger said, which should be taken into account in the U.S. policy considerations. "If we feel that, under present circumstances, the radicals are likely to take over, that could affect our judgment about the necessity of bringing the civil war to an end."

He continued that if the United States had been presented with a choice on 25 March, it would certainly have urged Yahya not to take military action. But he recalled that everyone had been taken by surprise when the negotiations broke down and Yahya turned to military action.

Sisco noted that the United States and Yahya both had a large stake in the preservation of moderate leadership in East Pakistan. He noted that he had said privately to Hilaly that Pakistan had some interest in allowing those whom it had jailed to play a role in establishing a moderate leadership in East Pakistan.

Sisco said the CIA, much earlier than the State Department, had indicated the likelihood of Yahya's taking recourse to military action. The State Department had been much more inclined to see a negotiated settlement and, therefore, had worried less about this issue before 25 March.

Blee noted that the main opposition to Mujibur Rahman was the leftists. The moderate leadership was now mostly either in jail or dead.

Sisco described Hilaly's present line about how Yahya was planning to concede the "six points" to East Pakistani leadership.

Kissinger wondered why Yahya would have tried a military solution if he had expected to end up conceding anyway.

Blee surmised that the army had misjudged its ability to quickly subdue East Pakistan.

The discussion then turned to what the Indians wanted, and Kissinger pointed out that in earlier sessions the panel had assumed that the Indians wanted a unified Pakistan.

Blee replied that he felt what the Indians had really wanted was a very loose confederal relationship between East and West Pakistan.

Irwin noted that the Indians had proposed rescheduling the Indo-U.S. bilateral talks – from January, because of the election, to 24-25 May. He noted the problem of going to New Delhi without stopping in Islamabad. Saunders noted the difficulty of going to New Delhi if the East Pakistani insurgency were continuing and the West Pakistanis were holding India responsible for fueling it.

Kissinger showed great reservation, noting that Nixon "had a special feeling about Pakistan". He said he felt this problem would have to be checked with the president.

The assumption underlying the discussion after Kissinger asked individuals' views on the Indian request to provide arms to the guerillas was that there was no question of approving it.

The Central Intelligence Agency produced an analysis of South Asia on 12 April, examining "the present and prospective state of the Pakistani civil war, the role of India and other powers." It gave an outlook for Pakistan's two parts – "if the Bengali uprising should be put down and if it should succeed."

The study said that when Pakistan launched the crackdown on 26 March, the military leaders probably expected to destroy the Awami League and regain effective control of East Bengal in days, if not hours. They clearly miscalculated.

While precise figures were unavailable, large numbers of the 13,000-man East Pakistan Rifles remained intact, as did the several Bengali units of the Pakistani army. Despite serious logistic and leadership problems, these armed cadres continued fighting the Pakistani forces.

"The prospects are poor that the 30,000-odd West Pakistani troops can substantially improve their position, much less reassert control over 75 million rebellious Bengalis," the CIA observed. "This is likely to be the case even if the expeditionary forces are augmented. For most of East Pakistan's residents, the time has come for a separate Bengali nation."

Whether the Pakistan army would face widespread non-cooperation or continued active resistance would depend partly on how much help India gave the Bengalis. East Bengal's vast land frontiers with India would make it impossible to prevent the movement of arms and guerrillas across these extensive borders.

Significant evidence – including observation of weapons being trucked into East Bengal from the Indian border – showed that some arms

shipments had already taken place. India's support for the Bengalis would depend on its domestic popular pressures – which were quite strong. India's role in this conflict would also depend on an assessment of its own national interests.

India's parliament – Lok Sabha – and the press had already given the Bengalis strong support. India's national interests in East Bengal were enormous. Pakistan's disintegration would permanently remove a border threat. West Pakistan had long been India's principal enemy. A successful Bengali insurgency would weaken West Pakistan. East Pakistan, basically uninterested in the Kashmir dispute, posed no military threat to New Delhi. On the contrary, the Bengali leaders, particularly Mujib, wanted cordial relations with India.

"Hence, we estimate that India will continue and increase its arms aid to the Bengalis and this will enable them to develop at a minimum the kind of insurgency capability, which the army cannot entirely suppress. In so doing, India is accepting the risk that some of its arms may fall into extremist hands. In time, the Bengalis may prove more than a match for the army except where the latter is concentrated in a few strong points," the intelligence analysis said.

## India Sees Danger In Long War

India had another reason to help the Bengalis bring the crisis to a quick end. New Delhi was concerned that a protracted crisis could help the extremists assume the leadership and eventually take over the new country. Such a radical regime in East Bengal could pose severe problems for India, especially in West Bengal in the light of its own on-going Maoist insurgency. So, India not only sought to liberate Bangladesh, but also to ensure that a friendly government ruled East Bengal.

Initially, India preferred helping the Bengalis by clandestine means, such as covert arms support and the provision of sanctuaries. If the rebellion dragged on or if India saw a significant chance of a radical leadership emerging, it was ready to give more direct support, risking armed clashes with the Pakistani forces. The Americans did not rule out an open military intervention by India, which had sufficient forces to defeat the Pakistani forces in East Bengal without drawing down heavily on its troops on its other frontiers, especially along China.

India, of course, ran the risk in supporting the Bengali rebellion, even by covert means. It could provoke Islamabad to attack western India. However, in the 1965 war, the Indian military had already showed itself more than a match for the Pakistanis. In 1971, the Indians had become much better equipped than in 1965, and faced forces weakened by the transfer of Pakistani units to East Bengal.

In analysing the outlook for the crisis, the Americans concluded that the Bengalis had reached the point of no return. Even if the West Pakistanis succeeded in reasserting military control over the Bengalis, which seemed highly unlikely, they would almost certainly find it impossible to build a new political system based on anything approaching a consensus in the two wings.

India began supporting the Bangladesh guerrillas by April end. General Sam Manekshaw, India's army chief, ordered the Eastern Command on 1 May to train a force "for waging guerrilla warfare in East Bengal," according to the official *History of the Bangladesh War, 1971*, a study of some 5000 files of Indian government documents and interviews with sixty-six key participants in the conflict.

Operations conducted subsequently by the Mukti Bahini and the Indian commandos led by Major General Surjit Singh Uban proved spectacularly successful. In response, Pakistan intensified infantry and artillery attacks on Indian forward positions. India's initial success boosted its confidence. On 18 May, Gandhi issued a warning to Pakistan, saying that "if a war is forced on us, we are fully prepared to fight." By June, India had initiated several limited incursions into East Pakistan.

As the East Pakistan crisis dragged on to the month of May, India began to show a hardening of attitude. On 3 May, a U.S. envoy met with Swaran Singh in New Delhi. Galen Stone, U.S. chargé d'affaires in India, told the Indian foreign minister he had received first-hand reports that New Delhi was training the Bangladesh freedom fighters on Indian soil.

"I told him that I, of course, recognized the sensitivity of this matter. On a personal basis, I asked him to give me the justification for Indian activities in support of the Bangladesh forces," the U.S. Embassy reported to Washington in a telegram on 4 May 1971.

Singh termed the information as "absolutely incorrect".

Foreign Secretary T.N. Kaul, who was present at the meeting, referred Stone to the reports of Frank Moraes in the *Indian Express* newspaper as well as to those of British and American journalists regarding the training of the guerrillas. Kaul said the refugees were in no state to fight – they were hungry, sick and at times almost naked. He said India had prevented the organising of volunteers to fight in East Pakistan.

Singh was more blunt in his comments to the U.S. diplomat. He said he felt very uncomfortable that without carefully assessing what had actually transpired in East Pakistan, some people who were close to Islamabad attempted to allege that India's actions were politically motivated against Pakistan.

"I totally refute these allegations," India's foreign minister said. The United States should be the last to put India on the defensive in a situation like this, he said, expressing disappointment at the type of international recognition India was getting for all the restraint it had shown.

Kaul also accused Washington of "politicizing our relief". He, however, assured that India would not provoke a war with Pakistan.

On 25 May, a CIA report maintained that "while India probably does not seek a war with Pakistan, it may come to believe that its national interest requires a preemptive strike against Pakistan." One day later, Secretary of State William Rogers told Nixon that East Pakistan was on a path that could eventually lead to a war between India and Pakistan.

Until then, the Americans were unsure if India would finally go to war to create an independent Bangladesh. The U.S. ambassador to India told Kissinger on 3 June in Washington that the Indians were concerned about the deep ties between East Bengal and West Bengal, where a formidable guerrilla insurgency posed a serious threat to stability. Kissinger agreed with Keating. He said India's other concern was that "with the passage of time, the radicals would take over the resistance movement and would eventually cause more trouble for India."

## Capturing Dhaka Not In Initial War Plan

On 16 August, India's military commanders unveiled the Operation Instruction 53 – an unequivocal offensive mandate for Indian troops, according to the official *History of the Bangladesh War, 1971*. "Destroy the bulk of the Pakistani forces in the Eastern Theater," the Operation Instruction said, "and occupy the major portion of East Bengal, including the entry ports of Chittagong and Chalna-Khulna."



Capturing Dhaka was not mentioned in the initial instructions. But according to the *History*, the revised plans explicitly “envisaged that 4 Corps would cross the Meghna between Daudkandi and Bhairab Bazar and advance to Dhaka. 101 Communications Zone Area, with 95 Mtn Bde Gp [Mountain Brigade Group] would advance to Dhaka from the North.” Both these forces, India’s commanders believed, would receive help from Bangladesh freedom fighter Kader “Tiger” Siddiqi’s irregular forces.

It was not until 30 November, just three days before the formal outbreak of the general war, that the Indian commanders issued revised orders of “the liberation of the whole of Bangladesh as the military task of the Eastern Command.”

By June, India had become distrustful of U.N. actions to repatriate the refugees, an indication that New Delhi was no longer convinced of a successful peaceful settlement in East Pakistan. When Pakistan shifted ground to accommodate U.N. actions, India rejected the proposal for posting U.N. observers on its border. India was concerned that East Pakistan would return to the pre-crisis situation with little or no gain towards the Bengalis’ self-determination.

Domestically, the Indian government found itself in an increasingly favorable position by June. Public opinion in India’s turbulent eastern provinces favored severing Pakistan’s link with East Bengal as an opportunity to weaken a dangerous enemy. India, therefore, insisted that Pakistan must come to a political solution of the crisis founded on self-determination for East Bengal before social and economic aid was extended. But the U.N. approach was to put social and economic recovery in place before a political solution was attempted. America clearly supported the U.N. approach to return South Asia’s power balance to the pre-crisis condition, but India showed no interest.

After a lull in June, more refugees poured into India. Yahya continued to press the United Nations to force India to withdraw its support to the Bangladesh rebels and to decrease the border tension to induce more refugees to return home. He threatened that if India tried to seize a base in East Pakistan for rebel operations, he would start an all-out war. He followed up this threat by a Pakistani military build-up along the West Pakistan border with India.

Some Pakistani military officials, including Major General Akbar Khan, the military intelligence chief, saw the possibility of a general war as early as 6 May. He pointed to India’s military build-up along the border to buttress his assessment. By then, India had placed its air forces on war alert in six airfields near East Pakistan.

By June, India’s position had markedly hardened. Gandhi commented on 16 June that the possibility of a political settlement in East Pakistan was becoming remote everyday. She vowed that New Delhi would oppose a settlement that would mean Bangladesh’s death. India, she declared, was “prepared to make all the sacrifices” and “go through hell” to look after the six million refugees.

Gandhi, however, had told a different story when she met privately with Kissinger for fifteen minutes on 7 July 1971, in New Delhi. Kissinger later told Saunders, a National Security Staff member who recorded the discussion’s minutes, that “she does not wish to use force and that she is willing to accept any suggestions that the United States may have.”

Kissinger, who was to go next to Pakistan as part of his trip, told Gandhi that America had no ideas about how to solve the issue, but promised to form a judgment in Islamabad on how Yahya planned to proceed. He had read Yahya’s 28 June speech, but did not know whether Yahya had any long-range ideas.

“We certainly would use what influence we have to encourage a solution,” he vowed to Gandhi. “The whole point of our policy has been to retain influence in order to help create a situation which would enable the refugees to return. If this does not produce results, we will have to re-examine our policy.” He said he could not promise how any re-examination of policy would evolve.

Kissinger went on to say that all the U.S. specialists in March predicted West Pakistan would not use force in East Pakistan. He told the prime minister that Washington would take a new look at the problem. However, he added, America’s ability to move events even with strong advice was extremely limited.

Gandhi told Kissinger that “India is not wedded to any particular political solution in East Pakistan.” She was, however, afraid of mounting Chinese influence in East Pakistan, where China had set up training camps for the Mizo insurgents to keep India bogged down in domestic instability.

Neither the Americans nor the Pakistanis initially expected India to intervene militarily in East Pakistan, according to a U.S. Defence Intelligence Agency report prepared by Army Major John Hunt after Yahya cracked down on Dhaka. “The Indian officials have indicated that they would not be drawn into a Pakistani civil war, even if the East should ask for help. Their intentions might be overruled if the fervor of the Bengali nationalism spills across the border,” Hunt said.

India’s sworn enemy, Bhutto, also did not see India hell-bent upon splitting Pakistan, although he accused New Delhi of taking advantage of the situation created by the military turmoil in East Pakistan. “A tragic civil war, which rent asunder the people of the two parts of Pakistan, was seized by India as an opportunity for armed intervention,” Bhutto wrote in *Foreign Affairs* magazine in April 1973.

## Mujib’s Release Could Have Avoided War

Gandhi told Nixon after the Pakistani soldiers surrendered in Dhaka that the “war could have been averted if the great powers had realized that the people of Bangladesh were being denied their ‘life and liberty, not to mention about their pursuit of happiness’ and had searched for a genuine reconciliation.” It could have been avoided “if the power, influence and authority of all the states and above all the United States had gotten Sheikh Mujibur Rahman released.”

According to a British assessment, India did not seek territorial gains either in the East or West, although both Prime Minister Edward Heath and Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas-Home were not fully persuaded that India would not take advantage of the situation to try to force some territorial adjustments.

However, Sir Denis Greenhill, British permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office from 1969 to 1973, told a meeting in London attended by the U.S. ambassador, the British prime minister and the foreign secretary that before hostilities began, India had indicated to him that if war indeed came, New Delhi would make the most of the situation to settle the Pakistan problem once and for all. All three – Heath, Greenhill and Douglas-Home – however, said that the British government had sought and received assurances from the Indian government that it did not seek territorial gains.

Gandhi's war preparations took urgency after Kissinger told her about Nixon's secret communications with China. During a private meeting with the Indian prime minister in July, Kissinger disclosed to Gandhi the Nixon administration's intention to normalize relations with China. He said there could be significant developments in the months ahead and assured her that "these were not directed at India and that they derived from our global policy." They, rather, derived from Nixon's feeling – which India seemed to have shared in the past – that a more normal world order and structure for maintaining world peace required that China be drawn into the international community of nations.

Kissinger's soothing words did not really put Gandhi at ease; rather they caused her significant anxiety. She told Heath during a visit to London in 1971 that Nixon's friendly overtures to the Chinese – and their closeness to Pakistan – had pushed India into signing the Indo-Soviet treaty, according to a secret transcript of Heath-Gandhi talks released by the British Public Records Office in 2003.

India, she said, faced a triple whammy with the new development, because the United States was establishing links with Beijing, which was already tied to Pakistan, a long-time foe of India. She felt that the United States was aligning itself with China, which fought a war with India less than a decade ago and still claimed part of its territory. India's pact with the Soviet Union ensured that the United States would not intervene in East Pakistan. It also helped deter China from opening a second conflict on India's northern border during the 1971 South Asian war.

Turning to East Pakistan, Kissinger told Gandhi that the use of force could lead to a serious war. On the other hand, there was a political situation that must permit the refugees to return to their homes.

Gandhi noted that she had written to Nixon about the urgency of resolving the refugee problem. While the flow seemed to be slowing down, it was difficult to be accurate about the actual numbers because many were in private homes fearing that if they registered, the Indian government would send them back to Pakistan. She put the number at 6.8 million "registered" refugees. She said that a good part of the feeling in India was emotional, created by the refugees – food shortages, rising prices and depressed wages.

When Kissinger asked whether the settlement in East Pakistan must include Mujib, Gandhi avoided a direct answer. Instead she said, "The settlement must be between East Pakistan and West Pakistan. This is not an Indo-Pakistani problem. India would not have been involved except for the refugees."

During Kissinger's meeting with Jagjivan Ram, India's defense minister discussed the Chinese military threat to India. Ram said he saw no change in the military balance between India and China. The Chinese had their concentrations of troops at some points and India's preparedness continued the same as it had been. The Chinese had been training roughly 1200 Mizos in East Bengal for commando work on the Northeast Frontier. Generally, however, the Chinese threat continued to be the same. They had not increased their forces in light of the East Pakistan crisis, although they had gradually improved their communications, their bunkers and their airports. About 100,000 Chinese troops were stationed on India's northern border.

Kissinger asked whether the Chinese could fight without reinforcement there or they were preparing some sort of an attack.

K.B. Lall, India's defense secretary who was also at the meeting, responded: India would know ahead of time of such an attack because the Chinese would have to build up their supplies there. Kissinger asked what had happened in 1962, and Lall replied that India was unprepared and that its information was bad.

When Kissinger asked how many months it would take the Chinese to build up their supplies to the necessary level, Lall said two to three months.

Kissinger commented that the United States made studies in Europe to try to determine the kind of build-up required by the communist forces before they could launch an attack. Ram said India had made similar studies, too. Ram added that a surprise attack by China would be difficult, even from Tibet. Nevertheless, Lall interjected, there is a great deal of talk and natural apprehension about what the Chinese might or might not do. He asked Kissinger whether he thought the Chinese would do anything without some provocation, and Kissinger replied that it seemed unlikely. It was possible, however, that the Chinese would intervene if there were to be a war with Pakistan.

Lall asked what would be the justification for such an attack. India was not going to go to war with Pakistan.

Keating, who accompanied Kissinger, explained that the Chinese had said they would support Pakistan in a war.

Kissinger added the United States "would take a grave view of any Chinese move against India", a promise Kissinger would later reverse during a conversation in Washington with Jha, the Indian ambassador. The Chinese, Kissinger added, had been cautious in their military moves, although they had been tough in their talk.

When Kissinger asked what the Indian problem was on the west, Ram said there was constant tension on the western border. Any accretion of military hardware created difficulties for India. Bangladesh should be seen in the wider perspective of peace and stability. The United States had to judge whether Pakistan could retain Bangladesh, Ram advised.

"Will it be in the U.S. interest for Pakistan to stay together?" he asked.

Kissinger replied that America was considering that question. "What can the United States do?" he asked.

A lot, Ram replied, noting how Pakistan had been sustained by the United States. He asked whether the secretary agreed, and Kissinger replied, "partially".

Ram said: "Look at your support for building the army of Pakistan." The refugee problem was bad enough as an immediate problem. If the people think they were going to stay in India, then it would be a problem of great social concern. But even ignoring that, a solution of the Bangladesh problem had to be found. Pakistan ought to have another election. "I would not mind that." He said he knew the Bangladesh leaders from Partition days. He knew what was going on in Bangladesh. If Pakistan did not get massive outside aid, it could not survive, he said, in an indirect lash at U.S. policy.

Kissinger defended America's policy, saying it was to try to avoid a confrontation with Pakistan and to have some influence on developments.

The Indians were less than satisfied with the explanation. What was not clear to the Pakistanis, Lall said, was that the U.S. policy was directed at encouraging a change in the situation.

Kissinger made it abundantly clear where the United States stood. America was "not in favor of secession. We are in favor of a political solution. We don't want to mislead India. What we want is a situation that will permit the refugees to return." The United States had no fixed view on what a solution should be.

Ram said he understood the situation in East Bengal. The Punjabis did not regard the Bengalis as of the same stock. The Punjabi rulers had not

put faith in the Bengalis. "Mujibur Rahman never wanted secession. He was a moderating influence," Ram stressed.

He said India's problem was the nearly seven million refugees on its soil.

Kissinger asked how Ram felt a solution could come about.

Ram replied that America could tell Yahya that he would have to find a solution that catered to the Bengalis' will.

Kissinger said U.S. actions were not directed towards finding the balance between India and Pakistan. Of India, America's interest was to keep it strong and stable; with Pakistan, it desired to preserve its influence on it.

"Our hope is to use that influence to encourage a settlement that will permit the refugees to return. If this policy is not successful, then we shall re-examine it," Kissinger said.

When Kissinger asked how many Pakistani forces there were in East Pakistan. Ram said there were about 70,000; Lall added that there were more than four divisions.

Kissinger asked how long they could fight in a major military confrontation.

"Not very long," Lall replied.

Ram added that for the Pakistani military forces, the logistics problem was real. "It would be difficult for them to continue fighting over a prolonged period."

Kissinger concluded that the U.S. interest was to help bring about a solution to permit the refugees to return. America had no intention of creating a balance of power situation between India and Pakistan.

Ram said he was glad that this was the understanding. "If India is weakened, it would affect the stability of the entire world." Kissinger simply replied, "That is our profound conviction."

The only balance of power the United States was concerned with was of the global kind – and the problem of preventing an outside power from dominating South Asia. The local balance within South Asia was not an American concern. "The difficult problem we now have between us as nations is to maintain that long-term perspective," the secretary said.

By 12 July when Ram told parliament that a new nation of Bangladesh would be established replacing East Pakistan, New Delhi had started seeing the conflict as a clear opportunity to weaken its major rival in South Asia. Pakistan had humiliated India in the war over Kashmir in 1965. India then had to divide its forces between East and West, while keeping considerable forces on its northern border with China. This time, New Delhi was determined not to be defeated again by Pakistan.

India figured that breaking East Pakistan from West Pakistan would greatly simplify its defense problem. India, therefore, decided to support the Bangladesh movement, while preparing its own armed forces for war with Pakistan, should intervention become necessary. Throughout the period, East Pakistan's independence was pursued consistently and skillfully.

Another ingredient favoring India was the overwhelming public support for its policy. The burden of ten million refugees in India's most populous and impoverished region was costly and caused social unrest. Furthermore, most Indians saw Pakistan as a threat, which would, in any case, lead to war eventually.

India started feeling more confident about clinching a military victory against Pakistan after it signed the treaty with the Soviet Union. Until the end of July, the Soviet Union had maintained a balanced approach to India and Pakistan in an effort to increase its overall influence on the subcontinent. However, after the United States and China moved towards closer bilateral relations and both supported Pakistan, Moscow and New Delhi cemented their ties with the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation signed on 9 August.

The treaty had little effect on India in military terms, but it gave the much-needed support for India's position at the U.N. Security Council. The Soviet Union opposed every proposal for any kind of intervention that could allow Pakistan to get a political settlement unacceptable to India, i.e., denial of self-determination for the people of East Pakistan.

For the Soviet Union, the treaty showed to the world its increasing influence in South Asia. It was in part a Soviet response to the Sino-U.S. rapprochement – *a policy aimed at encircling China and strengthening Moscow's position on the Chinese flanks*.

For India, it gave what it needed most: an ally with a veto power in the Security Council and the might to counter a Chinese threat. When the pact was signed, it relieved internal pressures on Gandhi. Subsequent events suggested that this treaty virtually guaranteed Soviet support in whatever action India took against Pakistan; in fact, Soviet support for Indian military action was reported by sources after Gandhi's visit to Moscow in late September. One report also indicated that the Soviets promised a diversionary action in Sinkiang if China threatened to intervene against India.

By skillfully managing its diplomatic affairs, India won enough time to prepare for military intervention while preventing wider international intervention that was potentially damaging to its aims. China considered Pakistan – in particular West Pakistan – vital to restricting Soviet influence on the subcontinent. Should both India and Pakistan be drawn into the Soviet sphere, China's borders would be threatened on all sides. With India having to deal with its rivalry with Pakistan, its threat to China would be much reduced.

For similar reasons, the Soviet Union was initially trying to steer an even course in the India-Pakistan dispute. However, when rebuffed by Yahya in July 1971, Moscow quickly saw the chance to increase its influence with India. Moreover, when India discovered America's secret overtures to China, it quickly cemented its ties with Russia and thus further strengthened its military might vis-a-vis Pakistan, an edge that boosted Gandhi's confidence that the chances of China's possible movement against India had been diminished. Armed with the Soviet pact and enormous international support, India embarked upon harnessing its unexpected opportunity against Pakistan.

Yet the Indian foreign ministry officials were less committed to resorting to war to solve the crisis than their counterparts in the rest of the Gandhi government. Leonid Shebarshin, an intelligence officer at the Soviet embassy in New Delhi, was among those who noticed this trend. "The Centre – unlike many in the Foreign Ministry – concluded that war was inevitable," Shebarshin commented in a secret KGB report, which was published in 2005 as part of *The Mitrokhin Archive*, a collection of Russian intelligence documents.

The KGB agents, despite their widest possible contacts in India, appeared unaware of New Delhi's precise war plans until the very last moment. Shebarshin, a ranking KGB operative in New Delhi in 1971, realized that the war had begun through an expected signal – when the lights went out in the middle of a diplomatic reception at the Soviet Embassy on 2 December. Leaving the embassy hurriedly, he met a senior Indian military commander, a KGB source whom he found to be in an optimistic mood. The general knew precisely when and how the war would end –

on 16 December, with the Pakistani army's capitulation in East Pakistan "because they had no one from whom to expect help", according to *The Mitrokhin Archive*.

India's involvement in the Bangladesh war was perhaps more fortuitous rather than preplanned. New Delhi's war policy evolved gradually, shaped by events at home and abroad. Until 25 March the Indians believed their interests were better served by a united Pakistan in which the Bengalis would be the dominant force. When the Pakistani military launched a crackdown in East Pakistan, India's estimate of its own best interests shifted in favor of an independent Bangladesh under a moderate leadership.

India opted to take advantage of the opportunity after it had solidified its position, militarily with its treaty with the Soviet Union, and diplomatically with its spectacularly successful campaign that generated a groundswell of global support for the Bengalis' plight. India initially showed reluctance to create Bangladesh by force, despite widespread support for it in parliament. Gandhi's decision to support the guerrillas was based on her calculation that if New Delhi did not support them, the insurgents would turn to China, causing peril to India's interests. Gandhi chose to march on the warpath, convinced that negotiations would not work even if Mujib and Yahya were able to work out a deal, because she believed that the insurgents were no longer loyal to the Bengali leader.

Gandhi also suspected that Yahya was not really interested in negotiations that would install Mujib in power. Her views were solidified by Yahya's attempt to hold a farcical election to fill the parliament seats that he had declared vacant and the formation of a civilian government with discredited right-wing Bengali politician Nurul Amin at its head and Bhutto as deputy.

Ultimately, India saw the 1971 conflict as an opportunity to weaken its main enemy in South Asia. After all, Pakistan had humiliated India in 1965. New Delhi was determined not to be defeated by Pakistan this time around. A weak Pakistan would greatly simplify its defense problem. India, therefore, covertly supported the Bangladesh movement while putting its military on a war footing, should the need arise. Indian public opinion gave overwhelming support to New Delhi's policy. They had been feeling the effects of the crushing refugee burden, which had caused social unrest, especially in West Bengal. On top of all this, most Indians saw Pakistan as a threat that could eventually lead to another war. Why not eliminate that danger when the opportunity knocked on the door?

By the second week of December, the United States had concluded that the birth of Bangladesh was inevitable. William I. Cargo, director of the Planning and Coordination Staff, sent a memo to Rogers on 11 December, blaming Yahya for the setback.

"It is not a new truth to note that the massive use of military force by Pakistanis against the people of East Pakistan, begun on March 25, was a colossal blunder and miscalculation," he wrote. "The disastrous effect of this initial blunder was compounded by the unwillingness or inability of the Yahya government to move rapidly to political reconciliation with the East Pakistan leaders."

The drastic weakening in Pakistan's real power position vis-à-vis India gave New Delhi an opportunity unequalled in the confrontation of these two countries. Given the deep-seated suspicion, fear and hostility between India and Pakistan, it might have been inevitable that India would conclude that military operations against Pakistan were a welcome means of exploiting the shift in the Indo-Pakistan power balance. Thus, India's resorting to war in East Pakistan was almost certainly dictated by Indian concerns that Pakistan might, by eleventh-hour political accommodation, escape the worst consequences of its initial blunder, Cargo concluded.

## Did Yahya Want to Hang Mujib?

On 13 May 1971, Gandhi sent a letter to U.S. President Nixon, which was delivered on 19 May by India's ambassador to Washington, L.K. Jha. Gandhi requested that the United States "impress upon the rulers of Pakistan that they owe a duty towards their own citizens whom they have treated so callously and forced to seek refuge in a foreign country."

Gandhi wanted America to persuade Pakistan's military rulers to recognize that the solution they had chosen for East Pakistan was unwise. In her letter, Gandhi voiced concern over Mujib's arrest. "India, including all the political parties, is deeply concerned with the personal safety of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman," she wrote. "If you consider sending any message to the president of Pakistan, we would appreciate your taking up this matter with him." Gandhi ended her letter with a personal note, wishing "the very best" for Nixon's daughter, Tricia, and her fiancé, Edward Cox, who had just been engaged.

Gandhi sent a message to Nixon again, on 11 August, saying India was "greatly perturbed by the reported statement of President Yahya Khan that he is going to start a secret military trial of Mujibur Rahman without affording him any foreign legal assistance.

"We apprehend that this so-called trial will be used only as a publicity to execute Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This will aggravate the situation in East Bengal and will create a serious situation in India because of the strong feelings of our people and all political parties. Hence our grave anxiety. We appeal to you to exercise your influence with President Yahya Khan to take a realistic view in the larger interest of the peace and stability of this region." Simultaneously, Gandhi issued an appeal to twenty-three other heads of states to use their influence to save Mujib's life.

Gandhi's plea to Nixon fell on deaf ears. Washington decided against responding to Gandhi's letter in writing lest India exploited it to its diplomatic advantage.

"Because of the possibility that the Indians might attempt to exploit any written reply to Mrs. Gandhi's August 11 message on the trial of Mujibur Rahman, we have decided that it would be preferable for the ambassador to make an oral response on behalf of the president to Foreign Secretary Kaul," Johnson explained in a telegram to the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi.

He instructed the ambassador to tell the Indians that Rogers had conveyed America's concern to Pakistan about Mujib's summary treatment. "We intend to continue to indicate our concern on appropriate future occasions, not only for humanitarian reasons, but also because we recognize the importance which the trial and the possible execution of Mujib would have in the broader context of search for peace and stability in South Asia."

Yahya had told Hobart Luppi, the U.S. consul general in Karachi, in May that Mujib "had committed a capital crime and would be tried in a duly constitutional court, and he would be given a fair and impartial trial."

Luppi told Yahya that Mujib had already been prejudged, based on Yahya's last address to the nation. He suggested that Pakistan might well weigh world opinion vis-à-vis the severity of the sentence, since Mujib enjoyed a great deal of international sympathy. Yahya's reply was noncommittal, but not necessarily negative. Yahya indicated he would think about it, according to a telegram Luppi sent to the State Department on 22 May 1971.

The American intelligence and diplomatic sources held that Yahya personally opposed executing Mujib. His senior military advisers and high court justices warned against hanging the Bengali leader. They feared Mujib's execution would seriously damage Pakistan's image abroad. America's pressure influenced Yahya's decision, too. Yahya also worried that if he executed Mujib, New Delhi would attack Pakistan. Irwin, the under secretary of state, told Nixon's foreign policy team in July that three things would prompt India to attack Pakistan: Some military incident; a famine, which would result in a wave of new refugees; or Mujib's execution.

On 22 July Syed Nazrul Islam, then acting Bangladesh president, sent a plea to Nixon to save Mujib's life.

Following Irwin's prediction and appeals from Gandhi and Nazrul Islam, Joseph Sisco, the assistant secretary of state, asked Nixon during a White House meeting on 11 August if it would be all right to ask Yahya not to execute Mujib.

Nixon's reply was couched in his typical convoluted language: "In view of the fact that we have not cut off aid and have a good personal relationship with Yahya, it is possible that unless he is 'totally trapped' he might be responsive. Yahya considers Ambassador Farland his friend. Any suggestions that we might have – such as 'not shooting Mujib' – Farland might point out to him." Keeping with his stated policy not to do anything that could embarrass Yahya, Nixon decided to ask Farland instead to privately raise the issue with the general.

Meanwhile, Rogers phoned Hilaly to express the widespread concern felt in the United States over Mujib's trial. Rogers made the call after Yahya had announced that Mujib's secret trial had begun on 6 August. Hilaly promised to pass on the secretary's message to Islamabad. But Rogers was less than satisfied with Hilaly's response, and told the U.S. ambassador in Pakistan to meet with the general.

On 19 August, Farland met with Yahya, along with Maurice Williams, the USAID deputy administrator. After Williams had left the meeting, Farland met Yahya alone to find out what the general had on his mind about Mujib. Farland sent a telegram to Rogers the next day that he had met alone with Yahya, based on his assumption that the president would speak more freely with him in private.

"I told Yahya that most, if not all, nations of the world were watching with intense interest and anxiety how the in-camera trial of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was proceeding, and most, if not all, were seized with concern as to its outcome. I concluded by stating that I, as a friend, felt strongly obligated to suggest that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman not be executed. Such an action, I said, would be in my belief contrary to the best interests of his government as well as to his own best personal interests," Farland wrote.

Yahya told Farland that his concerns were unfounded. He said he had gotten the most qualified Pakistani attorney, A.K. Brohi, to defend Mujib. He also said the military tribunal had been advised the trial must be conducted with the greatest care, without bias or prejudgment. Yahya further stated that because the charge carried a possible death sentence, it was his plan that if such be verdict, a request for mercy would be made in the Sheikh's behalf, and he would accept the petition.

Yahya observed that when this request for mercy reached him he intended to “sit on it for a few months” without making a decision until power was turned over to a civilian government. Once the mercy petition became the problem of a civilian government, there was little or no possibility that he would be executed.

“I finished my comments with the remark that, ‘from what you have told me it is obvious that you have given considerable thought to a solution of this problem.’ Yahya replied, ‘I have, and you can stop worrying because I am not going to execute the man even though he is a traitor.’” Farland reported to the State Department.

## Yahya Promises Not To Hang Mujib

Farland admitted it was one of his daunting tasks. Farland raised the question of Mujib’s trial with Yahya at almost every meeting since May. On 28 September he wrote to the State Department that Mujib’s trial and sentencing offered “an example of both use and limitations of our leverage” with Pakistan.

“And, the final story has not yet been written. I have raised the question of Mujib with Yahya at almost every meeting since May, and it is also one of the few issues in which we have also exerted public pressure on the government of Pakistan. The results have been as much as could have been hoped for realistically. Mujib has been brought to trial on charges that could lead to the death penalty. On the other hand, the trial is not being conducted in a summary manner: Mujib has been allowed an outstanding defense lawyer: And, we have received personal assurances that he will not be executed.”

Among the prominent Americans concerned about Mujib’s execution was Senator Ted Kennedy. On 8 September Kissinger told a Washington Special Action Group meeting that the Democrat senator had come to see him earlier in the day and told him Mujib was perhaps dead. Kissinger asked the group if that was true.

Referring to Yahya’s assurance to Farland, Sisco said Mujib would not be hanged, and CIA chief Helms said he had no information to support the rumor.

Kennedy had asked why there was no picture of Mujib published to still the rumors. “So we are reasonably sure he is alive?”

No one had a definite answer to Kissinger’s question, but Williams, deputy USAID administrator, voiced his agreement with Sisco: “It is inconceivable to me that they would announce a trial and arrange for a well-known defense attorney if he were dead.”

Sisco added: “It’s even more inconceivable for the president of the country to tell our ambassador to relax – that Mujib would not be killed.”

Kissinger remarked: “I can’t imagine that he is dead.”

Yahya told the U.S. chargé in Pakistan, Sober, on 11 October that Mujib’s trial was still going on. If he were convicted, the court would sentence him to punishment, which would conceivably be death. The matter would then come before Yahya, who had the presidential power to modify the court’s judgment. He did not intend to permit any death sentence to be carried out. The new civilian government, which would presumably have an East Pakistani majority, would deal with Mujib’s future.

The envoy then asked whether Yahya could shortly reveal anything of his thinking along the above lines to a larger audience. Mujib’s role seemed to be a crucial issue, for example, to begin any direct talks between Pakistan and the Bengalis, Sober pointed out. Yahya responded that there were limits on his freedom of action. He pointed to the West Pakistan public opinion damning Mujib and opined that not a single West Pakistani political leader would welcome freeing Mujib and negotiating with him. Even the East Pakistani political chiefs with whom he had been talking in recent months, including elder leader Nurul Amin, had raised the specter of a return to the pre-March situation, which they said would result in terrible violence among the East Pakistanis.

As for himself, Yahya went on, if he now indicated that Mujib should be pardoned, people would ask why there had to be so much sorrow and trouble and would raise the question why Yahya should remain in office. Personally he did not hanker for power, but he had a duty to deal with critical problems, which his country faced. Yahya said he was not a ruthless person but a normal human being. He had no personal rancor against Mujib, but he could not disregard the facts provided by recent history.

This conversation occurred with no indication of the slightest annoyance on Yahya’s part that he was being pressed on what was perhaps the most highly sensitive issue facing him in the bar of world opinion. On the contrary, he responded calmly in stating pressures weighing on him and his rationale for the current stance. He appeared to wish leaving an impression that he was a man with rather little choice but to do what he was doing, the envoy observed.

Van Hollen disclosed to a panel headed by Kissinger in October that Farland had recently proposed to Yahya to make a deal with Mujib and that it was “interesting that Yahya did not take the usual negative attitude,” an indication the Pakistanis were planning to deal with the Bengali leader.

Van Hollen spoke based on a telegram sent by Farland that Yahya had told him Mujib’s trial had ended and that he was awaiting the tribunal’s report. When Farland asked if Yahya had considered using Mujib as a “trump card” to restore peace in East Pakistan, the general responded he had given thought to the matter but could not formulate a solution acceptable to West Pakistan. With thousands of the Mukti Bahini being introduced into East Pakistan at the onset of the dry season, the Americans felt that Yahya might feel more beleaguered and become more interested in seeking a settlement.

On 15 October, Helms told Nixon’s foreign affairs aides that according to a reliable source, Mujib had been sentenced to life imprisonment. Yahya could either uphold the sentence, commute it, or let the matter lie. His decision would indicate how conciliatory he intended to be towards East Pakistan, the CIA director remarked.

Even if Yahya initially thought of hanging Mujib, he changed his mind when he saw the signs of a military defeat by India and he had felt the Bengali leader could probably be the ultimate savior in extricating himself from the mess he had created. On top of this, the military ruler came under intense pressure from the Americans not to execute the Bengali leader. He promised to comply.

Whether Yahya really wanted to kill Mujib, would remain fodder for controversy. Some might argue, based on his statements to the American diplomats, that Yahya indeed wanted to execute Mujib, but changed his mind under international pressure.

Mujib himself feared the military wanted to kill him, a sentiment he confided in the former Punjab Chief Minister, Ghulam Mustafa Khar. Very

recently, in 2009, Khar revealed that the Bengali leader worried the military would kill him. Mujib had even asked Khar to convey to Bhutto that he, too, would be killed by the military.

Yahya denied he ever wanted to kill Mujib. During his house arrest under Bhutto, the general maintained a personal journal. He wrote in the journal before his death in 1980 that Bhutto had wanted Mujib hanged. Yahya also wrote that before he left for Iran in October 1971 to attend the 2500th anniversary of Iran's monarchy, Bhutto had told him to wind up the military court's proceedings to quickly finish off Mujib.

"I told him that until the proceedings of the court are finalized I cannot make a decision. He said that in Iran all sorts of pressures would be brought against me by heads of state to let off Mujib, so I must act at once and hang him," the general claimed.

Yahya's claims could not be dismissed entirely, because with Mujib alive, Bhutto could not be sure that the power he had craved so badly would actually come to him. It was clearly in his interest to have Yahya hang the Bengali leader to clear the way for the fulfillment of his long-held ambition to get to the top power rung.

Yahya also claimed that he told Bhutto before handing over power that the court proceedings had been completed, but were being reviewed by the Law Ministry and so he could not take a final decision.

"The way he told the nation that I had ordered the execution of Mujib and that he had saved him! Lies! Lies! Lies! But then what else could be expected from a master liar? It can be checked up with the proceedings of the military court and the dates and timings of the case, which was being processed by the central government offices. The funny thing was that [the] good Mujib believed him when he told him that Yahya wanted to hang him but Bhutto saved him," Yahya scribbled in his journal.

In an interview with *Newsweek* magazine in January 1972 after his triumphant return to Bangladesh, Mujib said Yahya wanted to execute him the day East Pakistan fell, but Bhutto saved him by persuading the general that it would jeopardize the lives of the Pakistani war prisoners in India. Despite Bhutto's efforts, there was a move to kill him in jail, Mujib told *Newsweek*. But Bhutto "smuggled him out in the middle of the night and kept him in his house and other hideouts until his release."

Mujib's comments were possibly based on the misleading information given to him by Bhutto, because the latter was in New York when East Pakistan fell. While Niazi was negotiating the surrender, Bhutto worked on a U.N. resolution calling for a political settlement with the Awami League under one Pakistan. In fact, Bhutto told Farland that after taking over on 20 December 1971, he had Mujib released from prison and ordered him to be housed in a bungalow on his way to Rawalpindi. Bhutto first met Mujib on 23 December, according to an interview Bhutto had given to Kuldip Nayar, an Indian newspaper columnist.

Mujib, according to Altaf Gauhar, Ayub Khan's all-powerful information secretary who later became a journalist, was kept in Sihala Rest House near Rawalpindi. As a prisoner during Bhutto's rule, Gauhar was kept in the same room where Mujib had stayed. Gauhar was arrested for criticizing the military action under the Yahya regime in an article in the *Dawn* newspaper.

"My jailer, Abdul Rahman, who was a senior superintendent of police, was good enough to inform me that this was the room in which Mujibur Rahman was kept till he was released by Bhutto," Gauhar later wrote in an article in *Gauhar.com*. "You will be sleeping in his bed and using his quilt. The jailer 'took me outside to show me the shells of peanuts which Mujib used to eat. As time passes one gets used to one's jailer. One day Abdul Rahman told me that Mujib nearly went mad and started banging his head against the wall of the room. 'I want to see Yahya Khan,' he kept shouting. 'I can stop the massacre that is going on in Dhaka.' Abdul Rahman conveyed this to General Pirzada, but Mujib was not allowed access to the president."

Bhutto never admitted having any discussion with Yahya regarding Mujib's trial on the day he took over. He said Yahya handed over power to him after a short meeting upon his return from attending the U.N. Security Council session in New York.

Even if Bhutto wanted Mujib's death during the war, his thinking changed after he assumed power. Concerned about the Pakistani soldiers held in captivity in India, Bhutto believed that if he hanged Mujib, he would infuriate the Bengalis with serious consequences. Moreover, even after Bangladesh became independent, he nurtured a dream of an accommodation with the Bengalis and requested Nixon to delay Bangladesh's recognition to allow him time to unsuccessfully try to reach an understanding with Mujib. He once told the Americans that he would exchange Mujib for the war prisoners.

After the war, the Nixon administration claimed that its quiet diplomacy succeeded in saving Mujib's life. Peter Constable, country director for Pakistan and India at the State Department during the war, told Congress in 1972 that the administration successfully intervened to save Mujib. "I should also note here that as part of efforts for a political accommodation, the United States sought and received from President Yahya, assurances that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would not be executed. Those assurances were honored, and following the emergence of an independent Bangladesh, Pakistan's new president, Mr. Bhutto, released Sheikh Mujib and allowed him to return to Dacca," Constable said in his testimony before the Fraser subcommittee.

## Moshtaque-U.S. Secret Talks: What Really Happened?

On 13 April 1971, an Awami League representative met with the British deputy high commissioner in Kolkata. In a report to the State Department the same day, the U.S. Consulate General in Kolkata said the Awami representative indicated that Tajuddin Ahmed, prime minister of the Bangladesh government-in-exile, wanted to meet with U.S. and British diplomats.

The State Department, unsure of Tajuddin's bona fides, asked the U.S. Consulate General in Dhaka to verify his leadership role. The consulate confirmed Ahmed's key position in the Awami League and said he would probably emerge as the political head of the Bengali resistance movement.

Although the British officials agreed to meet with Tajuddin, the State Department instructed the consulate general in Kolkata to decline to do the same. Washington felt that such a meeting could have implications regarding Bangladesh's recognition as an independent country. The department, however, left the door open for future meetings with Ahmed or other representatives of the Awami League, the dominant Bengali political organisation.

Despite some rethinking of its initial posture, the Nixon administration remained firm on its policy not to deal with the Bengalis lest such a step antagonize Pakistan. On 7 May, General Alexander Haig, the deputy national security adviser, sent a note to Irwin, reiterating an earlier instruction from the president to give Pakistan a free hand in deciding the East Pakistan issue.

Nixon knew that only greater autonomy would restore normalcy in East Pakistan in the long run, still he preferred "to see the West Pakistanis reach that conclusion, if it is valid, for themselves," the note said. The U.S. position for now, therefore, should allow Yahya time to follow through his efforts to work out his own arrangements. Based on this rigidity, the U.S. Consulate General in Kolkata turned down the request to meet with Tajuddin Ahmed.

Analyzing the Bangladesh leaders' move, Harold Saunders, member of the National Security Council staff, felt confused about what motivated them to approach the consulate. In a memo, he told Kissinger: "As you know, Bangladesh representatives in India have recently sought out and made contact with middle-ranking U.S. officials in New Delhi and Calcutta concerning a settlement with the West Pakistanis. It is not at all clear, however, what they are really fishing for. The approach in Calcutta, allegedly reflecting the Bangladesh foreign minister's wishes, was along the lines of a settlement on the basis of something less than full independence, while the approach by the foreign secretary in New Delhi was based on the opposite outcome of total independence."

Mahbubul Alam Chashi, Bangladesh's war-time foreign secretary, had separately asked the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi for help to reach a peaceful resolution with Yahya Khan.

Meanwhile, the State Department told the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan on 22 June that it had received a document addressed to Nixon and datelined, "Mujibnagar," 24 April 1971, seeking immediate American recognition of the "sovereign independent People's Republic of Bangladesh".

Syed Nazrul Islam, acting president, and Khandakar Moshtaque Ahmed, foreign minister, signed the document. It was sent via regular international air mail from West Berlin, Germany, postmarked 26 May 1971, with no return address.

The department raised questions about the method of transmittal, but concluded that if the document was indeed genuine, then "it is the first formal request from the officials of the Bangladesh movement for" U.S. recognition and "has sensitive political implications".

This document made "it difficult for us to continue to take the public line that we have never received any request for recognition" from Bangladesh, the department told its diplomats in South Asia. Still, it decided not to acknowledge its receipt, but to merely record it with the Records Services Division that routinely logs all communications received by the State Department.

### Kolkata Conspiracy

Moshtaque Ahmed, an admittedly pro-Western and right-wing politician, unequivocally favored strong ties with the United States. He opposed communists, as did a majority of the top Awami League leaders. Yet he was singled out as the man who hatched the conspiracy in Kolkata to seek a compromise with Yahya, excluding Sheikh Mujib, a story that gained wide circulation in Bangladesh soon after the war.

A.Z.M Haider, who was then working for the now-defunct Eastern News Agency, a wire service in Dhaka, once narrated the story, quoting a book, *After the dark night: Problems of Sheikh Mujib*, by S.M. Ali, a Bengali journalist. Haider bought the book in New Delhi when he went to cover the Simla Agreement and presented it to Mujib, with whom he had a very cordial relationship. Suspecting Mujib might never finish the book, Haider underlined several lines for him to read before giving it to him. Mujib read the lines and then commented, "Hmmm, I know everything."

Those lines read thus: "Khandakar Moshtaque Ahmed, the foreign minister of the provisional revolutionary government of Bangladesh, sent a message to the State Department through the U.S. Consulate General in Calcutta for a compromise with Yahya Khan within the framework of one Pakistan minus Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. That message was intercepted by the Indian intelligence and passed on to Mrs. Gandhi. Mrs. Gandhi, in turn, passed it on to Tajuddin Ahmed, the prime minister of the provisional revolutionary government of Bangladesh. Upon receipt of the message, Tajuddin Ahmed became furious and put Khandakar Moshtaque Ahmed under house arrest in Calcutta."

In fact, the contacts with the Americans were initiated not by Moshtaque, but by Kazi Zahirul Qaiyum, an Awami League parliament member from Comilla, who claimed he represented Moshtaque. On July 31, Qaiyum told a political officer at the consulate general in Kolkata the Awami



League leaders feared that extremist elements would take over the Bangladesh movement if guerrilla war lasted too long. So, they were interested in a political settlement and were prepared to back away from their demand for total independence. Qaiyum proposed a meeting between the Awami League, Pakistan, the United States and India to strike a deal with Yahya. He stipulated that Mujib's participation in the negotiations was a prerequisite.

## Entire Awami League Wants Compromise With Yahya

According to Qaiyum's statements, it was not just Moshtaque, but the entire Awami League leadership, including Syed Nazrul Islam, that wanted a political deal with Yahya Khan.

Qaiyum's meeting with the Americans was initiated by an unnamed Awami League representative who went to the consulate on 30 July 1971, to request an appointment for Qaiyum with the consul general. When told that was impossible, he said Qaiyum would meet with any other available officer.

During the meeting, Qaiyum gave the Awami League movement's background up through the elections and 25 March events. Noting the Awami League was openly pro-Indian and pro-American, he said his party's contact with the Americans had been lost and that Moshtaque had selected him to attempt to re-establish it.

Moshtaque had also instructed Chashi some time earlier to contact the Americans, but he was uncertain how best to go about it. Qaiyum gave no indication to the political officer that he knew about Chashi's approach to the U.S. ambassador in New Delhi. He said Moshtaque wanted to meet with the U.S. government officials, but such a meeting must be handled discreetly, preferably without India's knowledge.

Qaiyum, who had attended an early July meeting of the Awami League representatives near Siliguri, said a vast majority of them believed that only the United States could save the East Bengal situation. Despite the 10 April independence proclamation, which was reaffirmed at the early July meeting, the Awami League leaders still wanted a political settlement with West Pakistan, he said. He said the war would not solve the problem; no one could foresee ultimate ramifications of an Indo-Pak conflict. From his personal experience, he noted that even the brief 1965 war had caused an enormous setback on his Comilla business interest.

Qaiyum reiterated the familiar contention that the leftists would take over a prolonged guerrilla struggle. The communists had only one percent support in East Bengal, but they were working frantically to infiltrate the liberation movement. Qaiyum cautioned that if the repression and sufferings of the Bengalis continued, young men, who were joining the Mukti Bahini, would be won over by the communists.

When the political officer asked about Bangladesh's plans, Qaiyum said Tajuddin Ahmed was at a loss as to what to do. Seizing and holding liberated territory in East Bengal was not feasible because it required two fully trained and equipped army divisions. Rather, he thought the Mukti Bahini would continue guerrilla warfare in an effort to cripple West Pakistan's economy and will. He said the Awami League had some friends in West Pakistan who might eventually influence the situation to the party's advantage. Pakistan might be compelled to change its policy towards East Bengal in six months. Qaiyum feared, however, that West Pakistan would get enough foreign aid to enable it to continue much longer on its present course, thus virtually ensuring an eventual takeover of East Bengal by the extremists.

He hoped America would not provide further military and economic assistance to West Pakistan, but expressed understanding and approval of U.S. efforts to maintain a dialogue with Yahya. He suggested that the best way – and perhaps the only one – to solve the impasse was to have Nixon, Yahya, Gandhi and Mujib hold a summit similar to the Tashkent conference.

He realized that much work would be required to organize such a meeting, but felt that there were men of goodwill available on all sides to do such kind of work. The Awami League, he said, would be willing to retreat considerably from positions taken since March 1971. For example, he foresaw the possibility of a settlement allowing portions of the Pakistan army to remain in East Bengal, supplemented by U.N. forces, to protect non-Bengali interests. The acceptable Pakistan army units would be the five or six East Bengal Regiment battalions that were then stationed in West Pakistan, plus one or two Baluch and one or two Pathan battalions.

The political officer told Qaiyum, "We would, of course, report the meeting, but did not encourage him to expect any substantive response." Qaiyum indicated he would call again the following week.

While the consulate general did not name the officer in the cable, the Foreign Service List showed George B. Griffin was a political officer in Kolkata at that time, in 1971. Griffin was refused an entry visa by the Indian government in July 1981 to take up his post as a political counselor at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi. America accused India of making the decision based on Soviet "disinformation," but P.V. Narasimha Rao, then external affairs minister, dismissed the charge, saying it was decided independently and "was in no way prompted by a third country".

The consulate general reported to Washington on 1 August that Qaiyum impressed the officer as "a sober, responsible man, and we have no reason to doubt his bona fides. We are struck by moderation of his views as contrasted with the strident tone of the 'official' Bangladesh propaganda. We think it is plausible that the Awami League leadership, looking ahead to grim alternatives that will face them if the present chaotic situation continues, are seriously considering a compromise settlement and are trying to establish contact with the U.S. government with this in mind. Although Qaiyum claims his sentiments represent a consensus of the elected Awami League leadership, we believe it is important to determine whether, in fact, the top leaders were equally moderately inclined," the mission commented.

On 7 August, Qaiyum met again with the political officer at the consulate. He reaffirmed he had contacted the U.S. mission under Moshtaque's specific instructions. Moshtaque, however, never mentioned Qaiyum when he met with the political officer in late September at the Bangladesh High Commission.

During his meeting, Qaiyum emphasized two points: only the United States could successfully arrange a settlement, and that Mujib must be a party to such a settlement. If Yahya executed Mujib, he stressed, prospects for a compromise "will be zero". He added that the other Awami League leaders, including the cabinet members, had "no authority, no control over the masses" and would be unable to negotiate a deal.

On the other hand, he continued, if Mujib struck a deal the Bengalis would accept it, even it meant a return to the status quo ante. The refugees would go home under any pact Mujib approved. For this reason, Qaiyum asked that the U.S. government do everything in its power to ensure Mujib's safety. He told the diplomat America was following the correct policy by allowing limited arms shipments to Pakistan, as this would make it easier for Washington to approach Pakistan on the political settlement issue.

Qaiyum also told the diplomat that the Awami League leaders believed a war could break out, perhaps in the following fifteen to twenty days, which would spell an “enormous disaster” for everyone on the subcontinent. There were rumors that India might soon recognize Bangladesh. Such a move would sharpen the Indo-Pak confrontation, reduce prospects for a political solution, and make war more likely. If the war came, the Soviet Union – rather than the United States – was likely to lead the settlement talks, he predicted, adding that it would be to the Awami League’s disadvantage.

Qaiyum requested that Washington act quickly. The United States could judge exactly how to initiate the talks. He recommended that America first convey to Pakistan the Awami League’s desire for a compromise through either Pakistan’s ambassador in Washington or the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad.

He authorized the political officer to disclose to Pakistan the details of his conversation. He said he personally would go to West Pakistan for talks and Moshtaque would, too, provided the ground had been prepared and they had assurances of safe conduct. Moshtaque also wanted to confer with the U.S. officials, but did not know how best to arrange such talks.

Qaiyum said the Mukti Bahini was increasingly becoming a powerful military force. He said Bangladesh had developed a two-pronged military strategy. It intended to build the Mukti Bahini as a “conventional” force of two divisions from the existing one, consisting of ten battalions of 1200 men each. When the second division was trained and equipped, the soldiers would use their conventional forces to seize and hold a portion of East Bengal. Meanwhile, the fighters would continue guerrilla-warfare tactics throughout the province. Qaiyum said India had 500 Bengalis in military schools at Dehra Dun and in Rajasthan, who would be assigned to the “conventional” forces upon completion of their training.

India, he said, was in the process of providing the conventional divisions with modern equipment, including anti-aircraft guns. The guerrilla fighters were given shorter training at camps near the border. In the long run, he predicted, the Awami League could achieve a military victory.

The U.S. consul general in Kolkata, Herbert Gordon, summed up the conversations in a telegram to the State Department on 7 August. Qaiyum told the political officer the Awami League leadership was unanimous in their desire for a compromise settlement with Pakistan. Gordon reported that, to the best of his knowledge, Qaiyum was the only Awami League contact with the U.S. government thus far.

Gordon saw no reason to doubt Qaiyum’s bona fides, but Washington remained skeptical. The State Department asked the U.S. Consulate General in Dhaka to verify Qaiyum’s position in the Awami League. The Dhaka mission reported he was not prominent in the leadership but was probably Moshtaque’s confidant and a bona fide representative.

When the Americans sought to reconfirm Qaiyum’s compromise plan, they got an entirely different picture from Chashi. On August 8, when the political counselor at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi met with the Bangladesh foreign secretary, he contradicted Qaiyum. Chashi said, “The goal of the movement was total independence.” He wanted to talk with Ambassador Kenneth Keating about it, but settled for the counselor after being told that Keating’s official position precluded him from seeing a Bangladesh representative. Chashi urged America to support total independence rather than try to hammer out a deal with Yahya under one Pakistan, as Qaiyum stipulated. Why did Chashi contradict Qaiyum? Moshtaque possibly wanted to test how America – and Yahya – would react to diverse formulations.

On 9 August the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan weighed in on Qaiyum’s approach. It concluded that even if the initiative was legitimate and represented the Bangladesh leadership’s views, Yahya was unlikely to accept it. Furthermore, the embassy saw a hidden risk to the relations between the United States and Pakistan in becoming involved as a conduit for a proposal such as that put forward by Qaiyum. Still, in the interest of longer-term relations with Bangladesh, the embassy judged the risk was worth taking.

In Washington, the issue of contacts with the Bangladesh representatives came up on 11 August, when Nixon addressed some members of the Senior Review Group, including Kissinger, Irwin, Moorer, Cushman, Williams, Sisco and Saunders.

Kissinger opposed the idea of asking Yahya to deal with the Awami Leaguers. He said that asking Yahya to deal with the Awami Leaguers was “like asking Abraham Lincoln to deal with Jefferson Davis,” a reference to the confederate president during the American Civil War. Kissinger said Yahya was “not the brightest man in the world,” but asking him to deal directly with the Awami League would be hard to do.

Nixon agreed: “We can’t ask Yahya to do that. We can’t allow India to dictate the political future of East Pakistan.” He said the West Pakistanis probably could not dictate the political future of East Pakistan, either. But Farland could talk privately with Yahya if the United States could come up with concrete suggestions, the president said.

Kissinger said Yahya would listen if the point were “hooked to” a refugee resettlement proposal. Nixon responded that Williams, who had just been named the U.S. representative to coordinate American relief efforts in East Pakistan, could give Yahya an opportunity to “do something political in the name of humanitarian relief”.

The president then instructed Irwin and Sisco: “Tell your people that it isn’t going to help for them to publicly take a stand on the political issue. Our people have got to stay neutral on the question of political accommodation in public. Privately, we can tell President Yahya that he should not shoot Mujib.”

Irwin pointed out that the degree to which Yahya could be moved towards a political accommodation would increase the ease of moving towards a successful relief program: “We could move behind the scenes in doing this.” Nixon replied that the United States did not care “who runs the place out there,” a reference to East Pakistan. “We can’t answer that problem.”

Irwin said the issue of dealing with the Awami League had been discussed with Rogers. “We have had reports in recent days of the possibility that some Awami League leaders in Calcutta want to negotiate with Yahya on the basis of giving up their claim for the independence of East Pakistan. The question being discussed is whether Ambassador Farland could talk to Yahya just suggesting that if the Awami League is serious about withdrawing its claim of independence Yahya might consider talking with them.”

Nixon said Farland was the man on the spot. Hence he should not be ordered to say certain things to Yahya. He suggested checking any ideas with Farland. “We don’t have to give him the final say because we might come up with some good ideas here, but we ought to check with him,” the president added.

On 12 August, the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad warned that Pakistan was very sensitive about contacts between the U.S. officials and the Bangladesh representatives. The embassy advised the State Department to keep such contacts at a low level and as unofficial as possible.

The next day, Saunders asked Kissinger’s clearance to send a cable to the New Delhi and Kolkata posts, advising them about making contacts with the Awami Leaguers. He said it remained unclear what the Bangladesh representatives were “really fishing for”. He noted Qaiyum’s and

Chashi's different proposals. Qaiyum's wishes were "along the lines of a settlement on the basis of something less than independence," but Chashi's approach "was based on the opposite outcome of total independence."

Saunders did not question why there were two approaches. He merely instructed the U.S. missions to make no commitments for future meetings with the Bangladesh representatives, without first checking with the State Department. He advised to limit the scheduled meeting on 14 August largely to another low-key listening exercise. He, however, authorized to probe the question of the Awami League's willingness to negotiate for less than independence.

"We must not get into a position where our contact with the Bangladesh representatives will be misunderstood or misread by them or Islamabad," the cable advised. Yet Saunders saw "some value in at least keeping our option open of informally talking with the Bangladesh types, but we need control and we will need to square ourselves with Yahya before this goes further."

The cable indicated the State Department would next consider informing Yahya of the contacts and passing along whatever seemed worthwhile.

On 14 August, Nixon wrote to Yahya to advise him to enlist the support of East Pakistan's elected lawmakers for a national reconciliation – a step he said "will be important in countering the corrosive threat of insurgency and restoring peace to your part of the world." In addition, Nixon said, continued progress on the political front would "mean that our own counsels of restraint in New Delhi will have a greater chance of success." He also disclosed that Farland and Williams would "share with you some additional thoughts on these subjects."

Qaiyum met again with the consular officer on 14 August. He "reaffirmed that he was acting under instructions from his foreign minister who was prepared to accept a negotiated settlement that provided for less than complete independence. Qaiyum emphasized that only Mujibur Rahman could negotiate on behalf of the people of East Bengal, and only he could get them to accept a political settlement."

The next meeting between the political officer and Qaiyum took place on 19 August. Qaiyum had sought an urgent meeting with the officer. He told the diplomat he had briefed the Bangladesh cabinet on his contact with the United States. The cabinet had instructed him to convey the message that it appreciated the U.S. efforts and was willing to accept any settlement negotiated by Sheikh Mujib. The cabinet requested advice from U.S. experts on dealing with the problem.

"Although we have discouraged Awami League MNA [member of the National Assembly – Pakistan's parliament] Qaiyum from initiating contact with the consulate general, he sent a message to the political officer on 19 August urgently requesting a meeting the same night. He explained that he was leaving the next day for Agartala and had important information to convey prior to his departure. As there was inadequate time to check with the department, the political officer agreed to see him to continue the "listening session," the consulate reported to the State Department on 20 August.

The cabinet met in the evening of 16 August. Present were Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Moshtaque Ahmed, Finance Minister M. Mansoor Ali, and Home Minister A.H.M. Kamaruzzaman. Qaiyum, the only other person present, was asked to describe his contact with the consulate general. He was excused after being told the cabinet would consider what he said and later give further instructions.

On 17 August, Qaiyum met with Moshtaque who said the cabinet had several points it wished to convey to the Americans. Qaiyum had taken notes during his conversation with Moshtaque, which he referred to while talking with the political officer. He told the officer about two hopeful signs: the report that Mujib's wife was taken to West Pakistan, and Hilaly's public comment that Mujib would not be summarily shot.

Qaiyum explained Mujib's wife had been a moderating influence on him. She was instrumental in persuading Mujib to remain in Dhaka on 25 March in the hope that he would be able to reach a compromise with Yahya, even at that late date. The cabinet suspected that the U.S. government was somehow responsible for these encouraging events, Qaiyum explained, and thus wished to voice appreciation.

The cabinet decided that any agreement reached between Mujib and Yahya would be acceptable to it, provided it was arranged through the "proper channels." By the proper channels, Qaiyum meant the U.S. government's participation in arrangements leading to a formal pact. The cabinet opposed any deal negotiated via the Soviets such as the Tashkent Declaration.

The cabinet discussed the Indo-Soviet treaty and felt that it could lead to East Bengal being "swallowed by the Indo-Soviet combination." It asked for U.S. expert advice for the Bangladesh government to cope with this problem, in particular, as well as the overall East Bengal situation. Qaiyum elaborated, saying Bangladesh had no experts and lacked adequate funds; he said it was not in a position to figure out how to tackle its problems and was therefore soliciting America's advice.

The cabinet wanted Moshtaque to visit the United States with a delegation of three or four other Bangladesh representatives to discuss ways of solving their problems with U.S. officials. The Bangladesh leaders sought Washington's cooperation in facilitating this trip. Qaiyum said the foreign minister understood that he could not be received officially in America because of its potential to create diplomatic issues with Islamabad.

Qaiyum said there were both hardliners and softliners in West Pakistan. Both the groups wanted to keep Pakistan intact. Hardliners, such as General Tikka Khan, thought that this could be done through a harsh but brief military repression. Softliners, represented by Admiral S.M. Ahsan and General Yakub Khan, believed that Pakistan could remain together by making an honorable settlement with the Awami League. Now that the hardliners had failed, there might be a scope for the softliners.

Qaiyum personally favored complete independence for East Bengal, but he and most other Bangladesh representatives would willingly accept some sort of a confederation for East and West Pakistan. Explaining the cabinet position on this, he said the cabinet members "believe that Mujib's life is more valuable than independence."

On the question of recognition, Qaiyum said, "Everyone understands that if India recognizes Bangladesh, everything is finished." By this he meant the recognition would permanently close the door on the possibility of a compromise solution. He also believed that if Mujib was executed, the Bangladesh government as currently constituted would collapse. The cabinet had resisted efforts from the left-wing extremists to form a united front. If Mujib died, it no longer would be able to resist this pressure, and the united front would be formed, which would be quickly dominated by the leftists.

Qaiyum said he and the majority of his colleagues were anticommunists and rightists. They wanted to save themselves. The only way they could envision doing this was to work out a compromise in the near future. Qaiyum said some day there must be a settlement. From the personal standpoint of the Awami Leaguers, they hoped it would be the one in which the United States, rather than the Soviets, was involved.

The political officer told Qaiyum that he would report this conversation to Washington but the consulate general was not "authorized to enter into any sort of 'negotiations' with him." Qaiyum said he understood, but nevertheless said the cabinet appointed him on 16 August as the point of

contact with the U.S. government.

"We told Qaiyum, frankly, what we reported to the United States was at a considerable variance with the 'hardline attitude' openly taken by other Bangladesh representatives. We suggest it might be useful if the Bangladesh government found additional ways of their desire for negotiated settlement known," the consulate reported to Washington.

Qaiyum replied he could get signatures of 375 MPAs and MNAs [members of provincial and national legislatures, respectively] on a statement attesting to their agreement to seek a negotiated settlement. He also offered to have the foreign minister draw up a document explaining their position and present it to the Americans.

When Qaiyum talked to the political officer in Kolkata, the U.S. relief coordinator for East Pakistan discussed the idea with Yahya in Islamabad. During the meeting with Williams on 19 August, Yahya refused to deal with anyone under the Awami League banner. The next day, Farland cabled Kissinger that Williams' effort to persuade Yahya to reinstate the outlawed Awami League proved to be an "out and out nonstarter".

Still, America decided to persist. On 22 August, in a telegram cleared by Sisco, Irwin and Kissinger, Washington authorized the embassy in Islamabad to inform Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Sultan Khan about the contacts with the Awami League "on [the] off chance that the Qaiyum proposals might provide a glimmer of hope for a negotiated political settlement". The embassy was instructed to stress that the American officials had just listened to Qaiyum, but formed no judgment on the value of his proposals. America was not seeking to be a mediator, but was willing to help "as a friend".

Two days later, Farland requested a private conversation with Yahya after a formal session on narcotic drugs issues with Ambassador David H. Popper, who was stationed in Cyprus and fighting to combat drug abuse. Farland told the general that many Awami League legislators "were seriously amenable to the acceptance of an agreement which would maintain the integrity and unity of Pakistan, within the general concept of the so-called 'six points,' if such an agreement could be somehow reached between Mujibur and Yahya."

"I told Yahya that in making mention of this I wanted him fully to understand that the U.S. government had taken no initiative whatsoever in gathering this information nor was the U.S. government seeking to play a mediatory role between the government of Pakistan and the outlawed Awami League," Farland reported to Washington. "Conversely, I stated that the U.S. government had consistently maintained a diplomatic stance of non-involvement and had in no way sought out or solicited contacts with the 'Bangla Desh government' representatives. However, I noted Yahya's many conversations with me during which he emphasized his hope for a return to normalcy and his additional hope that with such a climate he could turn power back to the people. Since the U.S. government was now privy to this information, I thought that in the interests of the much-sought-for peace, I should bring it to his attention."

Yahya was pleased with the ambassador's gesture.

"Yahya's reaction was favorable and positive," Farland wrote to Washington. "He was most happy that I had provided him with this type of intelligence" and he felt that the United States had been correct in its political and diplomatic posture. Farland added, "Yahya hoped our officials, with their customary care and exercise of discretion, would maintain appropriate contacts."

Farland asked Yahya if he saw any major obstacle to a select Pakistan government members' meeting, unpublicized and on neutral ground in a foreign country, with key people for whom Qaiyum indicated he spoke. "Yahya replied he would favor such a development wholeheartedly, asking that in case such a contingency developed, I keep closely in touch with him on this matter generally," the envoy reported.

Farland then gave his interpretation of the developments, saying several forces were at play: (a) "At least some of the Bangladeshers are realizing that their independence would be sorely limited by the interests of India; as such independence may be an illusion; and (b) Yahya may be coming to the conclusion that his appetite wasn't commensurate with the bite he took." The second point referred to his unleashing the military on the Bengalis. In any event, he added, the foregoing represented a glimmer of light amidst the encircling gloom and a hoped-for vindication of U.S. policy vis-à-vis Pakistan.

On granting Moshtaque a visa to visit Washington, Farland told the State Department he opposed the idea. "To do so would almost inevitably raise concerns here about our good faith in not encouraging the separatist movement," the ambassador reasoned. The State Department had sought the U.S. Embassy's idea on the suggestion put forward by Qaiyum that Moshtaque be granted a visa to visit Washington to meet with the U.S. officials there.

While Farland sounded upbeat, on 26 August the CIA gave a negative outlook for the secret talks.

"Although Yahya Khan says he would be agreeable to talks between the representatives of Islamabad and Bangladesh, for the purpose of seeking a political rapprochement, such negotiations remain unlikely as there is no prospect for the release of the East Pakistan leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman," the agency said in a report.

"Although he has reportedly decided against executing the East Pakistani leader, it is unlikely he would consider halting the trial and releasing him. The Awami Leaguers, however, have consistently said that Mujib would have to participate in any final settlement, and they would probably be reluctant to agree to any talks without prior assurance that his release would at least be a subject of discussion."

Based on the CIA's input, the State Department backtracked on the talks. On 31 August, it sent a telegram to the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan, saying, "We do not, however, believe that the time has come for the United States to play any mediatory role." The department added, "There may be some merit in carrying out the present honest broker role one step further, i.e., by helping the two sides communicate with each other on arrangements for a meeting on neutral territory for an exploratory session on the possibility of serious negotiation."

Washington further advised Farland to verify Qaiyum's bona fides; the best way to do that was to contact Moshtaque directly. "If he, in effect, verifies the content of the approaches previously made by Qaiyum, we would then want to inform him that the substance of talks with Qaiyum had been passed to President Yahya. We would also inform Moshtaque Ahmed that Yahya showed interest in a meeting of Pakistan government and Bangladesh representatives."

"Should reactions from both sides to a meeting prove favorable, we could then examine the question whether further U.S. role in providing the communication link between them would be necessary or desirable," the State Department advised.

Farland endorsed the State Department's scenario, indicating he would put forward the suggestion in his meeting with Yahya on 4 September.

The department specifically told the consulate in Kolkata that if Farland received Yahya's approval, the post should at the earliest opportunity

contact Moshtaque to arrange a meeting in a neutral country. If the subject of Moshtaque's visa surfaced, Rogers advised the consulate to say the request had been referred to Washington. He should be given no encouragement. If Moshtaque was out of India, the department told the consulate to report to Washington his whereabouts at the soonest possible time.

When Farland met with Yahya on 4 September, he told him, "It might be useful to attempt to verify Qaiyum's bona fides, and we thought the best way to do that was through a direct contact with (Moshtaque)." If Moshtaque verified the validity of Qaiyum's approaches, Farland continued, "We would propose to tell him that the substance of Qaiyum's talks with us had been passed to Yahya, who had shown interest in a possible meeting (of the two sides)."

Yahya readily accepted Farland's proposal and told the ambassador that Moshtaque was one of the true moderates among Mujib's followers. Yahya recalled that during his talks in Dhaka in March, Moshtaque had on one occasion voiced his concern that some of Mujib's men were adopting positions that were too radical.

Farland told Yahya the Americans would pass back to him Moshtaque's reaction, particularly if he wanted to meet with the Pakistan government officials. Yahya suggested such a meeting might take place in East Pakistan. Farland said Moshtaque had been thinking of going to Britain, so London might be a better site. Yahya raised no objection. Farland advised Washington to instruct Kolkata to promptly contact Moshtaque.

On 8 September, when the Senior Review Group met, Sisco disclosed that America was trying to persuade the Bangladesh leaders to seek a political solution under one Pakistan. "We think the six points are within the ballpark. We sent the cable to the Bangladesh leaders at Yahya's request."

In Kolkata, meanwhile, things took a sharp turn. When the consulate general tried to make an appointment with Moshtaque, it learned that the Bangladesh cabinet's position had hardened. It was now taking the position that only Mujib could deal with Pakistan. Thus the leaders in-exile opposed talks at this stage.

As a precondition to open talks, the cabinet demanded two things of Yahya: (a) he must free Mujib and return him to East Bengal; and (b) he must proclaim a general amnesty for all national and provincial lawmakers and others connected with the Bangladesh movement – essentially a return to status quo ante 25 March. Qaiyum, nonetheless, promised to suggest to Moshtaque that he speak to the consulate officers.

## Tajuddin Opposes Talks With Yahya

Qaiyum said the conditions had changed considerably since his last meeting with the political officer two weeks earlier. He said the cabinet met on 28 August to hear his report and discussed the feasibility of sending Moshtaque to America; it failed to reach a conclusion, however. All the cabinet members approved the idea of negotiations with Pakistan, except for Tajuddin Ahmed.

"I believe he is turning leftist," Qaiyum remarked.

Later that day, the cabinet began several meetings with D.P. Dhar, India's foreign policy planning chairman. Dhar put intense pressure to form an all-party advisory committee. The Awami Leaguers unanimously opposed the notion, pointing out the massive victory they scored in the December elections.

Dhar, who was India's ambassador to Moscow, was mostly interested in giving Moscow-oriented leftists, Muzaffar Ahmed of the National Awami Party and Moni Singh of the Bangladesh Communist Party, a voice in Bangladesh affairs. He said "our friends – the Russians" insisted on such participation in return for their continued support of both Bangladesh and India.

The impression left with the Bangladesh cabinet was that if they did not accede to the request, arms supply and other Indian support would cease, Qaiyum observed. "When you are so heavily dependent on one friend," he remarked, "you do what he asks." Later, Qaiyum wondered whether U.S. financial or military assistance might be available to Bangladesh. The U.S. diplomat indicated no optimism on the matter.

Dhar's meeting with the Bangladesh leaders was followed by a visit from Kaul on 6 September, who apparently nailed down the bargain and had it leaked to the press on 7 September. Qaiyum reported that he was visited three times by Aruna Asaf Ali, a leader of India's Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee. A top Soviet backer, Ali tried to persuade Qaiyum to support the inclusion of the leftists into the Bangladesh picture.

On 8 September 1971, several Indian newspapers carried stories about the formation of an all-party advisory committee, called the National Liberation Front, whose members included the following: the entire cabinet; Syed Nazrul Islam; Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, the pro-Beijing National Awami Party leader; Muzaffar Ahmed, Moni Singh, Manoranjan Dhar, of the Pakistan National Congress; and Mukti Bahini commander General MAG Osmany. Qaiyum told the consul that the panel was not yet formed, nor had its membership been decided.

After Dhar's visit, Qaiyum went to Meghalaya, Mymensingh and Tripura, for meetings with Bangladesh MNAs and MPAs. At the meetings and in separate discussions with "General" Khalid Musharraf, former East Bengal Regiment major and a Mukti Bahini Eastern Sector commander, Qaiyum found a near-unanimous opinion that only Mujib could talk with Pakistan. They all agreed to accept any deal that Mujib might reach with Yahya.

In the evening of 8 September, Qaiyum returned to Kolkata and reported to the cabinet his findings, except for the complaints that the government was ineffectual. Qaiyum did not attend the cabinet discussions, and Moshtaque later told him, "Things have changed." The cabinet opposed holding talks while Mujib remained imprisoned.

Qaiyum told the officer that as Mujib's "close friend" he knew that Mujib did not want independence. He said Mujib had repeatedly told this to the Pakistani leaders before 25 March and begged them to let the MNAs sit down to discuss the constitution rather than initiate rash military moves that could destroy the nation.

"They didn't listen," he said sadly, "I still don't understand them."

Asked to outline the cabinet's previous preconditions for negotiations, Qaiyum sketched four points: (a) free Mujib; (b) a settlement on the basis of Mujib's six points; (c) the Pakistani army's departure from Bangladesh; and (d) Bangladesh's security to be guaranteed by the U.N. security force and not by the Pakistani army. He quickly added, however, that those conditions were no longer considered to be within the competence of the cabinet to levy. The cabinet's current position was a two-point demand, namely, free Mujib and return him to East Bengal to reduce tensions, and grant a general amnesty to all MNAs, MPAs and others connected with the Bangladesh movement.

"Then we can sit down and talk," he said. "The two people who are qualified to negotiate with the Pakistanis are the Sheikh and Kamal Hossain, and they are both locked up in West Pakistan."

Qaiyum repeated a scenario wherein Nixon, Yahya, Gandhi, Mujib and possibly Heath, would meet to settle the issue. "They could solve it in half an hour," he said, "but it will take us, alone, years of hard fighting."

The political officer saw no real chance of the holding of such a summit, but wondered if a meeting between him and Moshtaque might help. Qaiyum asked rhetorically what good such a meeting would do in the present circumstances, but then said he would put the question before Moshtaque on 10 September and inform the consulate of his reaction. Qaiyum added he would suggest to Moshtaque that such a meeting might help in securing Mujib's release.

The officer said he was in no position to offer any hope that a meeting would provide any progress on that subject, but he would be happy to hear any ideas Moshtaque might have. Beyond that, he said, all he could offer was to report Moshtaque's remarks to Washington. Qaiyum murmured, he would see what he could do, but warned that in any discussion with the U.S. officials, Moshtaque would take a "hardline" stance and demand freedom for Mujib and complete independence for Bangladesh.

Commenting on the conversations with Qaiyum in August and September, the consulate general wrote to Washington: "In reviewing the record of the past conversations with Qaiyum, it appears to us that the latest discussion has nearly brought us full circle. While it represents no advance over the earliest known Bangladesh position, neither does it represent a basic retreat. It is clear that the Soviets or their Indian lieutenants have taken advantage of the situation to attempt to move in to put their men on the ground in Bangladesh."

On 15 September, the consulate general sent yet another dispatch to Washington about a meeting a day earlier between a political officer and Qaiyum. Qaiyum told the officer that Moshtaque had discussed with his cabinet colleagues a proposed meeting between him and the political officer. The cabinet questioned the meeting's purpose, and Moshtaque asked Qaiyum to find out why the officer wanted to speak to him. The officer replied he had been instructed by Washington to discuss the Bangladesh position directly with Moshtaque, and implied he might subsequently have something to say to the foreign minister.

Qaiyum agreed on the importance of the meeting. If Moshtaque remained reluctant to meet, he added, he would approach Tajuddin Ahmed or Nazrul Islam to take his place.

On 16 September, the officer met with Qaiyum again. He was told Moshtaque still questioned the need for a personal meeting and wanted to know what would be discussed. The officer replied he intended to listen to anything Moshtaque would discuss.

Two days later, the State Department told the Kolkata mission that Qaiyum's reluctance or inability to produce Moshtaque for the meeting indicated "considerable cooling of Moshtaque's initiative". While there might be many reasons for this development, the mission should not seek to lead the unwilling Bangladesh representatives into negotiation. Washington also dismissed Qaiyum's alternative suggestion of meeting with Tajuddin Ahmed or with Nazrul Islam, who were presumably not the instigators of Moshtaque's initiative.

"If, however, he should on his own produce appointment with one or both, hold the option open and report the soonest so that" the State Department could consider what use might be made of such contacts. "We do, however, see the point in continuing to seek a meeting with Moshtaque if for no other reason than to verify whether Qaiyum's reporting of Moshtaque's earlier and current positions has been accurate," Irwin advised the consulate general.

The State Department also suggested that the post "continue to discreetly seek contact with Moshtaque via any appropriate channel available".

On 20 September the consulate reported the Bangladesh leaders were divided over whether or not to meet with the U.S. officials. Qaiyum sent word through a messenger that while Moshtaque and Tajuddin were not interested, Nazrul Islam was "keen" to meet. The State Department gave the mission a green signal to meet with the acting president, at least to find out if Bangladesh had any interest in a negotiated settlement and if it had what its demands were at this stage. The mission was also advised to let Nazrul Islam know that Washington had passed on to Yahya "word of possible Bangladesh interest in negotiation and that the latter's reaction was one of interest."

A week after receiving this instruction, the consulate general indicated that it was "stymied" in its efforts to arrange a meeting with Nazrul Islam. The only channel to the acting president was through Qaiyum. Qaiyum sent a message that Syed Nazrul was still keen to talk to a political officer but was seeking permission from the Indian government to do so.

## **India Warns Nazrul On Talks With U.S.**

In the afternoon of 23 September, Qaiyum met again with the political officer. He reported that India had learned about the secret contacts and warned the acting president that talks with America could be a problematic matter. Ashok Ray of the External Affairs Ministry asked Nazrul Islam on 21 September if the Bengalis were talking with the Americans. Nazrul gave an affirmative reply.

Ray then cautioned Nazrul Islam that the political officer was an "experienced and extremely clever diplomat," who would attempt to manipulate the acting president and Bangladesh policy. Ray said that while India had no objection to such meetings, he would suggest that if the Bengalis wished to hold meetings, they should be arranged by India. New Delhi would advise them during those meetings because the Bengalis were "not fully adept to hold discussion with sophisticated U.S. government representatives." Ray implied that the Indian officials would accompany the Bangladesh leaders at such talks.

Nazrul Islam told Ray that no cabinet minister had yet met any U.S. official and that he would have to consider the matter. Nazrul Islam and Qaiyum later discussed Ray's remarks at length. They decided the acting president would meet with the political officer at the earliest opportunity, "whether Ray says so or not."

Qaiyum and Nazrul blamed India for the current internal dissensions within the Bangladesh government. "We are fed up with this attempt to control our actions," Qaiyum told the political officer. He expressed the opinion that India wished to prolong the current situation. This caused the Bangladesh government to worry, as it would help of Maulana Bhasani and his fellow leftists. Bhasani was attempting to "finger this situation" to gain time to organize his followers and forces. Qaiyum and Nazrul Islam believed that an early solution of the Bangladesh problem was the only way for the Awami League to maintain its leadership.

Qaiyum worked very hard to prevent a trip by Moshtaque to the U.N. General Assembly in New York, apparently because he did not want the

Bangladesh foreign minister to travel on an Indian passport. He told Tajuddin Ahmed that it would be an insult to the Bangladesh government to have Moshtaque go to New York using an Indian passport, as other members of the delegation planned to do. He argued that it made no difference if unimportant members of the delegation used Indian passports, but for the foreign minister of Bangladesh to do so would be considered ludicrous in the eyes of the world community.

"We are not, and do not wish to be, a colony or state of India. We want to be independent," declared Qaiyum.

When the diplomat asked what Qaiyum meant by "independent," he replied he personally would not press for immediate independence for Bangladesh. In his view, what was more important was that Sheikh Mujib be freed. Mujib could settle the internal Bangladesh dissension within twenty-four hours and every Bengali would agree to any solution Mujib might reach, whether this meant independence, regional autonomy, or some other arrangements, such as continued East Bengal's association with West Pakistan. He added he believed Nazrul Islam had the same views.

## **Hossain Ali Arranges Moshtaque-U.S. Parley**

On 28 September Moshtaque met with the political officer in Kolkata for some ninety minutes. Prior to that, Moshtaque had been looking for a way to contact the United States, but was unsure how. When *Time* magazine's Dan Coggin interviewed him on 26 September, he asked the journalist for advice on how to get in touch with Washington. Coggin suggested that he contact the U.S. consul general or a political officer. Following Coggin's advice, Moshtaque asked Bangladesh High Commissioner M. Hossain Ali to arrange a meeting. Ali called the political counselor to ask if he wished to talk with the foreign minister. The officer replied he did, if the foreign minister wished to talk to him. Ali said Moshtaque did, and scheduled an evening appointment. Ali, who had known the political officer through diplomatic circles, met him at the high commission. Moshtaque arrived five minutes later. He introduced the officer to Moshtaque and then left the two alone for an hour of private talk. He rejoined them for the last thirty minutes.

Moshtaque opened the conversation by asking the American for a precise outline of U.S. policy vis-à-vis Bangladesh. Moshtaque bluntly asked: "Why are you killing us?" He blamed America for the East Pakistan events since 25 March because of Washington's continued support for Yahya Khan. He, nonetheless, said Bangladesh wanted close ties with the United States and hoped Washington would find it to be in its own interest to help arrange peaceful independence for Bangladesh.

Moshtaque warned that the time was running out for America to step in and help avoid a leftist takeover of Bangladesh. He had no desire to talk directly to Pakistan, he said, and made a request for the U.S. government to speak to Yahya for the Bangladesh government. He asked for an official response to his requests as soon as possible and expressed a desire to discreetly maintain a direct channel with the political officer. He said he assumed there would be no other channel, as he himself had not authorized any other. He knew, however, that other well-intentioned Bangladesh leaders had contacted U.S. officials to find out the "mind of the Americans", and might again do so.

When the officer asked what Bangladesh expected from Washington, Moshtaque replied, "Stop helping Yahya. Stop helping kill my innocent people. You have practically forced my people into the lap of the extremists. What is our crime? You must put pressure on Yahya to stop. You have minimized my population, one million of them are dead. Another nine million have been forced to flee to India and Burma, where they are not wanted. You have done this with your arms, your money, your food, your transport, your medicines – all of which have been used by Yahya's troops against us. I don't like to speak this way to a representative of my old friend, but you asked me what we expect from the great democratic United States. I hope you don't mind if I speak frankly. I have studied your policy. You are not weak. You can tell Yahya 'don't use our arms.' Only you can do that."

The officer replied he had not come to argue the U.S. policy with Moshtaque, because that would merely involve long wrangle and polemics. Rather, he had come to hear the foreign minister's views.

Moshtaque quickly agreed that propaganda arguments were useless, saying he was a practical and realistic man. He said he was neither a communist nor a communist sympathizer. "I am a conscious anticommunist. That means I am a much more dedicated anticommunist than ordinary anticommunists." He said America could, by following its present policy, help the extremists win out in Bangladesh and deny all its democratic victory. "It is the United States upon whom Yahya now leans. If you want to, you can make him see what is the right thing to do," he said.

Moshtaque said Bangladesh was forced into accepting the communists on the consultative committee. The first notion was to form a war council, which was quickly rejected by him and other leaders. "Next, they wanted to form a liberation front, which I also resisted as hard as I could," he said. But he was forced finally to accept the lowest common denominator: the consultative committee. It was only an advisory body, he said, "but we will have to accept more in the next six months if you don't intervene. We want your shoulder to lean on."

At this point, the officer told Moshtaque the Americans were informed by a Bangladesh source that the Awami League leaders, specifically Moshtaque, had wanted to speak to the U.S. officials in early August and had expressed a desire to talk to Pakistan, too.

The political officer's remarks caused Moshtaque to pause for a moment and think. After pondering, he replied that he had always wished to talk to the United States, "our great friends" in hopes that it was still not too late to seek U.S. assistance. "We wanted you to help us preserve our democratic structure." He said the Bangladesh government wanted American protection from the Pakistanis and "others," as well as help in ensuring that "no one interferes in our affairs."

Moshtaque told the American that he saw no value in his talking to Pakistan. "I know Yahya. I know him to be a good man and I think he knows that I am a good man, but only you can influence him. I never thought he would do this. He will not listen to me now," Moshtaque said. He said Yahya might not be his own man right now. He suspected Yahya might be somewhat circumscribed by certain people and events.

Moshtaque asked the United States to make a fresh effort to push Pakistan to release Mujib. He then presented the officer with a list of Bangladesh desires. He did not wish to be held accountable for his precise wording because he was inexperienced in diplomacy and must later obtain the cabinet approval for the exact formulation. His list included three principal demands: (a) full independence for Bangladesh; (b) release of Sheikh Mujib; and (c) after independence, massive long-term economic assistance from America to help reconstruct the nation.

He said that if it turns out to be impossible to reach a peaceful settlement, the Bangladesh government would pursue war for independence until it won, "despite your guns." He realized the Bangladesh movement might get radicalized in such an eventuality. He said he knew that the Soviets were trying to take over, but added the Bangladesh government had no other choice. At this juncture, Moshtaque called in Hossain Ali and asked



him to note down the list of Bangladesh's "desires" he had given to the officer and read them back "so that we understand each other fully".

To cement his contacts with the Americans, Moshtaque wanted to go to the U.N. General Assembly session in New York. He had hoped to meet Rogers at the session, but as it turned out, he told the envoy, the U.S. government prevented Rogers from going.

When the officer asked to elaborate since he had heard of no visa application from the foreign minister, Moshtaque said he had been told Washington would find his presence in New York highly embarrassing. Since he did not wish to embarrass his "old and great friend," he had decided not to go.

Moshtaque said the Bangladesh High Commission was the most feasible location for meeting from all standpoints, because the Indians "can't look over our shoulders." The officer's arrival at the Bangladeshi High Commission, as well as his departure later, were handled discreetly. He was met at the gate by Hossain Ali and gave his name to no one else. In parting, Moshtaque tightly grasped the officer's hands with both of his and said, "I hope we meet again soon. I hope the United States will come to our aid."

Moshtaque impressed the U.S. diplomat as intelligent, clever, pragmatic, basically friendly, and reasonably articulate. He certainly did not appear as hazy as reported by British MP Peter Shore, but he was admittedly handicapped by his inexperience in foreign affairs. He relied heavily on his staff of professional foreign service officers. Moshtaque never admitted using Qaiyum or Chashi as the channel to the U.S. government, though his comments implied he had sought the use of both those sources, and perhaps others, to gather knowledge about U.S. intentions and policies. His use of those sources was an attempt to steer clear of the Indians and the Soviets. Moshtaque's statement and list of demands indicated that he wanted Washington to be involved in the settlement effort and post-settlement problems, rather than as a channel to Yahya. He gave no indication that he wanted to talk with Yahya, according to a report the U.S. consulate general sent to Washington.

Despite Moshtaque's expressed willingness to meet with Yahya, the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad continued to support a U.S. role in promoting contacts between Bangladesh leaders and Pakistan. But it opposed Washington's involvement as a mediator. It also opposed passing on to Yahya the objectives put forward by Moshtaque.

On 3 October Qaiyum told the officer that the Mukti Bahini had planned to dispatch 40,000 to 60,000 men into East Pakistan before November. He met with the officer to pass on a message from Syed Nazrul Islam seeking a rapid response from the United States to Moshtaque's 28 September démarche.

He said Nazrul Islam was in control of the Bangladesh government, but Islam insisted that only Sheikh Mujib could negotiate on behalf of Bangladesh. Qaiyum said the Bangladesh officials needed permission from India to talk with Pakistan. Any claim to the contrary by India was "a lie," Qaiyum added.

In Washington, the State Department decided to rebuff Moshtaque's idea that America talk with Yahya for Bangladesh. It instructed the U.S. mission in Kolkata to meet with Moshtaque to report back the U.S. views and tell him that Washington had no desire to place itself between Pakistan and Bangladesh. America wanted the Bangladesh leaders to present their views directly to Pakistan to explore the possibility of a negotiated settlement.

The department also told the embassy in Pakistan not to engage in any deeper discussions with Yahya about the Bangladesh leaders, but rather, to advise Yahya to establish contacts with the Bangladesh representatives in New York, London and elsewhere.

By September end, the Bengalis had hardened their attitude on the talks with Pakistan. Qaiyum's initial idea was thrown out, and they wanted nothing short of total independence. On 30 September, Nixon and Kissinger met at the White House with British Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home and British Ambassador Earl of Cromer. Douglas-Home noted the importance of making contact with the Bangladesh leaders for a political settlement.

Kissinger responded: "We have been in touch with the Bangladesh people in Calcutta. And, we were trying to set up a meeting between the Bangladesh people and the West Pakistanis outside of India. And we had Yahya's agreement to that. And, the Indians have now totally thwarted it. They made it hard for these people to deal with us. They're forcing them to check everything with them. They are padding demands, which are totally incapable of fulfillment."

Nixon also felt that the Indians were preventing a settlement: "They're playing a game here that I think is wrong. I think they're deliberately trying to make it insoluble."

Later in the conversation, Kissinger said: "The Bangladesh people are actually quite eager to talk. At first, they were willing to settle for autonomy, and as we all know autonomy would produce independence. There is no other way it can go. Now the Indians have escalated their demand into total independence immediately." He said Yahya would never agree to such a demand. "There has to be a face-saving formula and a transition period."

On 7 October, Kissinger held a Washington Special Action Group session. When he asked Johnson to discuss East Pakistan's situation, the under secretary said it was "a mess." He, however, reported one new development: The Shah of Iran had met with Yahya "and pressed him strongly to reach a political settlement."

Johnson also told the group that "we have been in touch with the Bangladesh people and have tried to encourage the development of a dialogue between Bangladesh and West Pakistan, but they are insisting on complete and unconditional independence immediately."

Kissinger: "You mean that's their starting point."

Johnson: "Yes, their initial position. Mujibur is the key. If Yahya would release Mujibur and make a deal with him . . ."

Kissinger cut him off: "I think that's inconceivable! Unless Yahya's personality has changed 100 percent since I saw him in July."

Johnson: "I agree that it's unlikely, but we have had some indications."

Van Hollen disclosed that Farland had recently proposed to Yahya to make a deal with Mujib and what was "interesting that Yahya did not take the usual negative attitude," an indication that the Pakistanis could be planning to reach an agreement with Mujib. "But this is highly speculative, and I think we must assume the contrary until we get more evidence."

The State Department concluded on 7 October that Yahya's political steps, which excluded the Awami League, failed to provide a basis of a settlement acceptable to the Bengalis. To create a political evolution, it suggested that "our next step should be designed to promote the beginning of a dialogue between the government of Pakistan and the Bangladesh leadership." It determined it could use two possible channels: India and Bangladesh representatives in Kolkata and elsewhere. The problem was that the Bangladesh leaders only wanted independence and Mujib's



release. The Indians were only likely to press the Bangladesh leadership towards talks if they believed the Americans would use their influence with Yahya.

On 8 October, the Indian envoy in Washington asked if Kissinger could ask Pakistan to release Mujib and let him enter the Bengali political life – it was necessary to keep the moderate control over the Bangladesh movement. He said the so-called foreign minister in Kolkata was being attacked by the Maoists, and the Awami League leaders were reluctant to let him talk with Yahya lest he be discredited further, and left the field wide open to the extremists. Kissinger responded that “it was important to understand what was possible and warned against unilateral action.” He did not elaborate.

The next day, the State Department told the American mission in Kolkata to respond to Moshtaque’s requests. “While much of the substance of what Moshtaque had to say, particularly with reference to expectations of what the United States could or should do in the present crisis, was fatuous or naïve. We, nevertheless, believe it is worthwhile to give him a response, with the intent of developing some momentum in moving the Bangladesh representatives toward talks.”

Washington’s instruction to its Kolkata post was clear: “You should tell him that the U.S. government has no desire to place itself between the government of Pakistan and the Bangladesh representatives or to enter into merits of the positions of either side.” It added, “The U.S. government, therefore, has no substantive comment to make on the points raised by Moshtaque. We would urge, rather, that the Bangladesh representatives seek the earliest opportunity to present their views directly to the government of Pakistan representatives in an effort to explore the possibility of a negotiated settlement.”

Washington also suggested that the consulate general tell the Bangladesh leaders that the American diplomats had “already discussed the possibility of such a meeting with President Yahya and he had indicated his interest. The U.S. government is willing to assist in passing messages back and forth that might lead to a meeting, but we are not interested in playing the transmission belt for ‘demands’ or ‘positions’ of one side or the other.”

Regarding Moshtaque’s “desires”, Washington said: “You should suggest to him that the Bangladesh representatives present these directly to the government of Pakistan in talks and not to us. Only by engaging in talks can the two sides hope to find ways toward an early end of violence, killings and other hardships that now afflict the people of East Pakistan. The alternative what we see is escalation violence, and possibly war, with further tragic consequences for the entire subcontinent. In our view, those who refuse to participate in unconditional talks may have to assume the responsibility for the continued loss of life and for the loss of ‘opportunity’ to achieve a constructive outcome.”

Despite their reluctance to get involved directly, the Americans wanted to keep their “options open for contacts with other elements of the Bangladesh leadership, although this will continue to be controlled from Washington. Hence, while we assume that Moshtaque may remain the principal channel for future communications, we do not wish to give him the impression that he will necessarily be the only channel. For example, we obviously might be in touch with the Bangladesh delegation in New York, which presumably was sent to this country for the purpose of contacting foreign officials, including the United States. Therefore, you may inform Moshtaque at your discretion that we intend to maintain some contact with the other Bangladesh representatives, if an occasion arises.”

On 12 October, in Moshtaque’s absence from Kolkata, the political officer met with Hossain Ali and gave him the substance of the instructions contained in the telegram. Ali promised to report the response to Nazrul Islam. If Islam deemed it necessary, Ali said he would make arrangement to send a copy to Moshtaque, who was believed to be in Tripura at that time, visiting guerrilla training camps.

Ali, however, questioned the usefulness of a dialogue with Pakistan in light of Yahya’s 12 October broadcast to the nation, which contained no glimmer of hope for a change in the general’s attitude. The officer clarified that it would be difficult for Yahya not to take the hard line publicly. Ali readily agreed that the speech obviously was meant for public consumption in West Pakistan.

The officer urged that the Bangladesh government seriously consider U.S. suggestions to save the lives of thousands who would perish in a potential war. He argued the worst the Bengalis could expect in a dialogue was Pakistan’s refusal to talk. That would be no worse than the present Bangladesh position.

The officer had contacted Ali to make an appointment with Moshtaque. Ali told him Moshtaque was out of Kolkata and not expected to return until 28 October. Bearing in mind the scheduled 23 October Awami League meeting, the officer decided to meet Ali instead.

Ali asked whether the United States had passed to Yahya the Bangladesh “desires,” which were given to the officer earlier by Moshtaque. The officer said he had not; Yahya had been informed of US-Bangla contacts, but not of the substance of the talks.

Ali said Nazrul Islam might wish to seek clarification and asked if the officer was willing to meet with the acting president. The officer replied in the affirmative. Ali then said he had no idea what the leadership’s reaction would be, but that the “total independence” and freedom of Sheikh Mujib were its only concerns.

In Pakistan, U.S. chargé Sober told Yahya on 11 October that he had nothing new or positive to report on U.S. contacts with the Bengali leaders. Yahya reiterated his continuing interest and asked to be kept informed. The American diplomat told Yahya that it would be difficult to arrange direct contacts with the Bangladesh leaders “unless one took into account the apparent continuous attraction of Mujib for the mass of East Pakistan population”. Yahya said he would not deny that Mujib was still an important symbol. He thought, however, that Mujib’s strength even at the time of the 1970 elections might have been overestimated. Actually, a fairly large proportion of the East Pakistan electorate had not voted in December, and a significant proportion of those who voted for Mujib were of the “minority population”, namely, the Hindus. Many of those who did not vote had been intimidated.

By October, New Delhi had become fully aware of the contacts secretly made between U.S. and Bangladesh. On 2 October, India’s external affairs minister visited New York to attend the U.N. General Assembly. When Sisco met with Singh, he urged the Indian leader to influence the Bangladesh officials to start talks with Yahya. Singh replied that India lacked influence with Bangladesh, which had independent financial sources and was critical of India for its failure to accord it official recognition. He quickly added that this did not mean India opposed the dialogue.

When Sisco suggested that India initiate dialogue without insisting upon Mujib’s participation to see what could be accomplished, Singh said the United States had contacts with the Bengalis and it had a greater influence on them, and thus it should try to bring about the dialogue on its own. Sisco said Washington would do what it could with Pakistan to get talks started.

On 22 October, the State Department told Nixon that Farland should tell Yahya to include the Bengalis in Kolkata when the general talked with East Pakistan’s elected members. But the problem was that the Bangladesh representatives had refused to talk with Yahya, insisting that nothing

could be negotiated except for independence and only Mujib could speak for Bangladesh. Given Mujib's importance, the department said Farland should again ask Yahya if Mujib could play a part in a settlement.

On 27 October, Herbert Spivack, the U.S. consul general in Dhaka, weighed in on a proposal from Nazrul Islam for indirect negotiations between Mujib and Yahya. Nazrul Islam had suggested that he and other members of his leadership team were sufficiently acceptable to Mujib and Yahya to act as a credible bridge between them. Spivack saw no point in pursuing the proposal unless Yahya was open, in principle at least, to negotiating with Mujib.

On 28 October, the consulate general in Kolkata pointed out other obstacles facing a negotiated deal. Several factors limited the Bangladesh leadership's flexibility, including an increased Mukti Bahini activity in East Pakistan, growing Indo-Pak tension, and the leftist pressure within the Bangladesh movement. The range of maneuver open to the Bengalis was further cut by news stories published in London revealing the consulate's role in promoting contact between the two sides. The conclusion drawn was that the effort had reached a "dead end" and thus it was time for Yahya to take the initiative and respond to the Bengalis' insistence that he make the first move to directly contact them.

Based on these assumptions, on 30 October, Irwin told the U.S. ambassador in Islamabad to tell Yahya that a long-term resolution could only be found through a political solution.

"With respect to Mujib himself, we understand sensitivities and only note that, right or wrong, he seems to have become the major symbol. So, at a minimum, it would seem necessary to the success of any political process to avoid any step, such as publishing the full transcript of Mujib's trial, which would inflame the Bengali opinion and might, as Yahya had already noted, produce an explosive reaction in West Pakistan."

"Whether Yahya can use Mujib as a 'trump card,' as he put it, at some point, we must leave entirely to his judgment. Short of that, we assume Yahya is fully aware of possibilities, such as a simple statement from defense attorney A.K. Brohi that the trial was fair, or use of any appeals procedure available, which would both soften the international criticism and provide further time to see whether some way is open for a negotiated settlement."

Irwin told Farland to suggest to Yahya not to exclude the Awami League leaders in Kolkata from politics under the new constitution and extend the amnesty to all the Awami League politicians.

"If these thoughts create major problems, what about indicating that under the new constitution there would be a possibility of fresh elections within two years so that those now frozen out of the process [by charges against them or by own choice] would see an opportunity for their own eventual reintegration into the political life of East Pakistan? If you find Yahya in a receptive mood on any of these 'thoughts,' you should use the opportunity to probe more deeply Yahya's ideas on the mechanics of getting a dialogue with Bangladesh started, reminding him that we have urged the Indians and the Soviets to get behind the idea of an open-ended political dialogue."

Although America started pushing extra hard to hammer out a deal, by October it had become abundantly clear worldwide that all the efforts to keep Pakistan united would only be futile. Sydney H. Schanberg, an American journalist, summed up the situation in an article for the *Foreign Affairs* magazine: "Every army reprisal against the civilian population produces new Bengali freedom fighters. The Bengalis – now sullen, bitter, hating – seem ready for a long fight for full independence. Talk of anything less, such as the old goal of East Pakistani autonomy within Pakistan, is considered heresy."

With the world opinion overwhelmingly in its favor, India made up its mind against allowing direct talks. India's foreign minister again raised the issue of America's secret contact with Moshtaque during a talk with the U.S. ambassador in New Delhi in October. Singh told Keating that India knew well that the U.S. officials were in close touch with the Bengalis trying to promote a settlement. America should focus on a genuine reconciliation, for it would be a great mistake to seek to promote a deal with the break-away Awami League element. "Situation is quite straightforward. Yahya simply cannot ignore Mujib and Awami League leaders; they are the true East Pakistan leadership. If Pakistan is looking for an excuse to start trouble, India will defend itself."

Keating said he had never met with Bangladesh representatives. Some of his junior officers, though, had informally met them in Kolkata and New Delhi, in order to "listen to their stories." He then told Singh he had been accused by the pro-Communist *Patriot* newspaper of attempting to disrupt the Mukti Bahini and the Awami League and cause internal friction. He said the United States lacked the power to do that and assured Singh that Washington had done nothing like it.

Singh said India knew of the effort to bring about a Yahya-Awami League dialogue. The Indian government did not need to read the *Patriot* for its view, he added.

Keating replied that the effort to promote such a dialogue seemed plausible but did not imply exploitation.

Singh said America attempted to bypass Mujib, an allegation that Keating sought to refute. Singh said that "the American Embassy in Islamabad under instructions from Washington had just finished urging President Yahya to establish dialogue with the elected representatives of East Pakistan, which I took to mean Mujib." Keating added the United States would be delighted if Yahya talked with Mujib.

On 17 November 1971, Dobrynin asked Kissinger about India's reaction to U.S. suggestions for talks, and if a Bangladesh representative had been designated. Kissinger replied, "Gandhi had appeared rather negative toward the prospects of such discussions. However, we had stressed the vital importance of starting discussions looking toward a political settlement. Although a representative had not been designated by Bangladesh, we believed that President Yahya would be interested in such a procedure and that Mrs. Gandhi should support it."

On 21 November, Qaiyum again met with the political officer after a month-long hiatus. He pleaded for the U.S. government to press Yahya on Mujib's release, saying unless he was freed, the communists would take over the Bangladesh leadership. He said that even if Mujib were kept confined in West Pakistan after his release, the situation would cool down, helping a negotiated solution. Only Mujib had the power to give Yahya a face-saving exit. He suggested Yahya hand over power to another general, as Ayub did, and go abroad. Yahya "has no right to destroy both parts of Pakistan." Qaiyum warned that time was running out. The Mukti Bahini was increasingly successful with India's help, and the Bangladesh leaders expected a military victory in East Pakistan within the next two months.

On 27 November, Qaiyum told the officer the Bangladesh cabinet had gone to Delhi at Gandhi's request. He had recommended that the cabinet members not "sign anything" in New Delhi unless they first brought it back to Kolkata for general Awami League discussion.

Qaiyum also told the American that D.P. Dhar, Gandhi's foreign policy aide, in his latest visit to Kolkata had questioned Moshtaque about his talks with the United States, calling the foreign minister a "traitor." Moshtaque denied everything, but Dhar said he knew all about the negotiations

because the State Department had told everything to the Indian Embassy in Washington. Qaiyum said he told the Indians the Bangladesh government had not sold its soul to India and that as an independent government, it could talk with any other government it wished, the political officer reported.

Qaiyum claimed he heard about the Dhar-Moshtaque exchange and protested about it to Syed Nazrul Islam, D.P. Dhar and Ashok Ray of the External Affairs Ministry. He said that he – rather than Moshtaque – had been the one who talked with the U.S. government representatives. If India did not like what he had done, it was just too bad, he said, as he and his group in the Awami League did not intend to be dictated to by India. He had threatened to walk out on the Bangladesh government along with some forty-three supporters and go to Pakistan rather than “sell out” to India.

America’s failure to bring about a negotiated settlement was later raised by Moshtaque during a conversation with the U.S. ambassador in Dhaka after he became Bangladesh president following Mujib’s overthrow in 1975. Making an appeal for American support for his government, Moshtaque told Ambassador Davis Boster on 20 August 1975, that Washington “must not lose the opportunity today which we had lost in 1971,” according to a telegram sent by the U.S. Embassy in Dhaka to the State Department.

The Awami League’s fear of a leftist takeover of the guerrilla movement, its desire to be free from India’s dictatorial grip, and its resolve to save Mujib – coupled with its fear of massive destruction and loss of lives if a war broke out – prompted the Bangladesh leaders towards seeking negotiations with Yahya. Moshtaque might have been motivated by his rivalry with Tajuddin, who enjoyed little support among most of his senior colleagues in the Awami League. The Bengalis feared an all-out war would reduce East Pakistan to ruins, plunging them into an almost insurmountable task of rebuilding the free country from ashes. They were frightened out of their minds by other thoughts as well, such as the effect of a prolonged guerrilla war as witnessed in Vietnam, or India potentially annexing a part of East Pakistan to resettle the refugees along the borders. Moreover, they worried that if India succeeded in slicing East Pakistan and West Pakistan would hold a big chunk of Kashmir, they might be caught in a diplomatic wrangling between Islamabad and New Delhi in which their interests would become a lesser priority. In the end, America’s dilly-dallying in arranging a meeting, as well as Yahya’s reluctance to talk with the Bengali leaders in Kolkata and Mujib, along with India’s ultimate resistance to any direct talks, thwarted the idea that Washington did not originate but fervently pursued.

## U.S. Fiasco in East Pakistan: Right Diagnosis, Wrong Medicine

On 13 April 1971, Kissinger forwarded a memo from the secretary of state to Nixon, suggesting that the time had come “to reexamine our basic stance toward Pakistan”. In the memo, Rogers stressed “the need to keep our options open in case East Pakistan becomes independent and to examine our relative priorities between India and Pakistan and the interplay of U.S. interests with those of communist China and the Soviets in South Asia.”

“The situation in Pakistan is changing,” Kissinger told Nixon in his forwarding letter, adding, “You will soon be called upon to make some decisions on our economic aid and military supply programs for Pakistan on which it will be difficult, if not impossible, to find a neutral ground.”

Three days later, on 16 April, a Special National Intelligence Estimate on “Prospects for Pakistan,” produced at the State Department’s request, sounded an alarm bell in Washington. “The current review of our posture toward Pakistan painted a bleak picture for Islamabad,” the study said.

In addition, the estimate said, the prospects were “poor” that the army could substantially improve its position, much less reassert control over the Bengalis. Whether the army was to face widespread non-cooperation or continued active resistance, would depend in part on how much help India gave the Bengalis. India “will continue and increase” its arms aid to the Bengalis; this would enable them to develop at a minimum the kind of insurgency capability that the army could not entirely suppress. Furthermore, whatever the extent of Indian support to the Bengalis, Yahya would face “increasingly serious difficulties” in East Pakistan.

Assessing the prospect of foreign involvement in the conflict, especially by the Soviet Union and China, the document said the Russians firmly opposed the military suppression of East Pakistan. India influenced the Soviet decision. China had come down heavily on West Pakistan’s side, but a Chinese military intervention in support of West Pakistan “did not now seem likely,” although they might increase arms deliveries. China, however, might in time face a dilemma should an extremist group come to the fore in the Bengali resistance movement and sought Beijing’s help.

If Bangladesh became independent “rather soon” it would possibly have a moderate leadership, the intelligence report predicted. A prolonged war, on the other hand, could lead to a takeover by an extremist and radical leadership. Over a longer term, even if the moderates initially took over, their inability to solve Bangladesh’s serious problems would lead to increased susceptibility to radical and extremist ideas and groups.

“Bangladesh would remain an object of continuing concern to India and, in the name of national security, would be an object of manipulation and even of open interference on New Delhi’s part. Indeed, an independent Bangladesh is likely to remain very much in India’s orbit so long as that New Delhi has a government strong and decisive enough to seek to exercise its influence,” the CIA concluded.

When Kissinger reviewed the National Intelligence Estimate on 16 April, he received a memo from Saunders and Hoskinson, who had prepared an assessment of Farland’s recommendations about Pakistan. Farland, the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, advocated “maintaining options in both East and West Pakistan.”

What the Farland plan meant, they explained, was “in our public stance we would take a somewhat firmer line than we have so far. This would include expressing concern for loss of human life, underscoring our desire to see an early end to the fighting and return to civilian government, and making clear our continuing concern about the use of U.S. arms to suppress the East Pakistanis. Privately, we would inform the Pakistanis, without threatening or lecturing, that we do not believe force will provide a solution.” This dialogue could begin with the president’s answer to Yahya, a reference to the Pakistani president’s letter to Nixon on 30 March.

By 19 April, two days after the Awami League formally announced the formation of the government-in-exile in Mujibnagar, the Americans started getting a clearer picture of the East Pakistan situation. A personal note that accompanied a memorandum by Saunders to Kissinger captured the new reality.

“It appears that the situation is settling down to one of prolonged conflict. We must guard against moving too quickly to a view that the West Pakistanis are regaining control, but it does seem increasingly clear that we are not going to be dealing with a situation in which the resistance movement is so dramatically successful as to make it immediately apparent to the West Pakistanis that they cannot win.”

Fresh information emanating from Pakistan only reinforced America’s previous assessment that the Islamic nation could soon be history. “Nothing has happened to alter our basic judgment that the breakup of Pakistan is inevitable, but events of recent days suggest that we may have been overemphasizing its imminence. What this suggests to me is that time may have been bought for a second chance to try mitigating some of the worst consequences of a split.”

Saunders advocated an even-handed policy in dealing with West and East Pakistan. “If we are to preserve some position in both East and West Pakistan, we have to consider the interests of both sides,” he argued.

He noted the two sides represented conflicting interests, with the West Pakistani military seeking to preserve the country’s unity and the Bengalis fighting to gain substantial autonomy. “We cannot assume that the problem is solved; it is only deferred.”

Going into details, he said the present situation in Pakistan “gives us an opportunity to reassess one of the options which we discarded before 25 March. We decided then not to inject ourselves into the negotiations between East and West. This was probably wise in that we really did not know what was going on and we would have appeared to be meddling in a situation over our depth.”

“Now, however, we have seen the potential consequences – economic problems in West Pakistan beyond our capacity, the possibility of an Indian-Pakistani war and the difficult choices which East Pakistani independence would thrust upon us,” he went on.

“The most important issue before us, therefore, may be whether we wish now to involve ourselves more actively in it attempting to help work out a negotiated settlement between East and West Pakistan.”

“What I have in mind is fairly limited. It is still true that these negotiations are so intricate and involve such passions on each side that we are ill-equipped to involve ourselves. However, the very problems we face lay the groundwork for an approach to Yahya which should be the product of the present policy review. However gentle our tactics, I believe our objective should be to encourage movement toward the greatest possible degree of East Pakistani autonomy.”

The day he received Saunders’ memo, Kissinger held a Senior Review Group session to gather an assessment of the East Pakistan situation. Cushman, CIA’s deputy director, painted a picture that showed the Pakistanis were, to an extent, succeeding in quelling the Bengali revolt.

“After three weeks of fighting in East Pakistan, the West Pakistanis hold the cities and are moving along the roads west of the big river. They can apparently move throughout the countryside as they wish, and it is only the fact that they do not have enough men that is limiting their movement,” Cushman reported.

He also said that the Pakistanis were taking the Bengali villages without any real resistance. “It was only a matter of time before they controlled all the population centers. The Bengali forces were not resisting; they were just melting away.”

Kissinger sought a clarification: “Are they melting away or disintegrating?”

Cushman replied: “They’re disintegrating. They are not in communication with each other and are not an effective force. Their morale is low and they are disorganized and fatalistic. They could, however, be a long-term problem if the Indians keep supplying them and they turn to terrorism or acts of sabotage. There is no doubt that the Indians are involved in clandestine support activities; they’re supplying them with arms, ammunition, food and medical supplies, and have sent in advisers and sabotage teams.”

He told Kissinger that India apparently wanted to recognize Bangladesh but decided to hold off because the Bengali leadership “did not control anything.” The Russians advised against the recognition because of their doubts about its viability.

China’s public statements, Cushman reported, remained favorable to Pakistan and accused India of intervening, “but we doubt that they will go beyond verbal support.” The Soviets, for their part, were opposed to the bloodshed and specifically did not support the insurgents.

By late April, Washington had moved beyond discussing the East Pakistan situation as an internal matter of Pakistan and whether Bangladesh would eventually become a reality. Now Americans saw a real possibility of an Indo-Pak conflict.

On 24 April Rogers sent a cable to the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, saying the State Department had advised that Pakistan “exercise maximum restraint despite what it might consider provocations from the other side.”

Washington sent the same message to New Delhi, saying India, too, “should act with restraint.” Sisco told Jha, India’s ambassador in Washington, “India was now strong and stable as [a] result of the election and, consequently, could be expected to act responsibly.” (It was a reference to Gandhi’s landslide victory in March 1971.)

## Kissinger Offers Three Options On Pakistan Crisis

Four days later, Kissinger decided to give Nixon the developments in South Asia. He told the president: “I do not normally bother you with tactical judgments. But in the case of the present situation in Pakistan, policy depends on the posture adopted toward several major problems. The purpose of this memo is to seek your guidance on the general direction we should be following.”

He then outlined three options for Nixon to consider: first, to support whatever political and military program Yahya chose to pursue in the East; second, maintain a posture of genuine neutrality; and third, make a serious effort to help Yahya end the war and establish an arrangement that could be transitional to the East Pakistani autonomy.

Kissinger personally favored the third option. The first option, he elaborated, “would have the advantage of preserving our relationship with West Pakistan. It would have the disadvantage of encouraging the West Pakistanis in actions that would drag out the present situation and increase the political and economic costs to them and to us.”

The second option, meanwhile, “would have the advantage of creating a posture that would be publicly defensible. The disadvantage would be that the necessary cutback in military and economic assistance would tend to favor East Pakistan. We would be doing enough to disrupt our relationship with West Pakistan, but not enough to help the East or promote a political settlement.”

The third option “would have the advantage of making the most of the relationship with Yahya, while engaging in a serious effort to move the situation toward conditions less damaging to U.S. and Pakistani interests. Its disadvantage is that it might lead to a situation in which progress toward a political settlement had broken down, the United States had alienated itself from the 600 million people in India and East Pakistan and the United States was unable to influence the West Pakistani government to make the concessions necessary for a political settlement.”

Nixon approved the third option and added a handwritten note: “To all hands. Don’t squeeze Yahya at this time.” He underlined “Don’t” three times. Nixon did that because of a memo General Alexander Haig, deputy national security adviser, had sent to him on 28 April. Kissinger had told Haig that it would help if Nixon included a note, saying he wanted no action that would squeeze West Pakistan.

On 29 April, just a day after Nixon directed Kissinger to pursue a policy that would help Yahya to bring about a settlement in East Pakistan, the president telephoned Haig. Nixon wanted to know whether the United States was helping to end the fighting in Pakistan as the Russians were.

Haig prematurely declared: “The fighting is about over – there is considerable stability now.”

Over the next months, reports kept pouring in that the East Pakistan situation had turned worse. America then realized that the military solution would yield no positive outcome. So, it wanted to see Yahya move toward involving more civilians in East Pakistan. As the food situation worsened in East Pakistan, the Americans felt a famine could soon break out. To handle the situation urgently, Farland told Yahya to appoint a food czar. The general appointed the former head of the Chittagong Port Authority, retired Commodore Rehmatullah Bajwa, as his personal representative. Yahya also decided to go to Dhaka in July to examine the situation himself.

The Americans were not entirely happy with Yahya’s token move to give the East Pakistan government a civilian character. In July, Farland urged Yahya to replace General Tikka Khan, the governor of East Pakistan, with a civilian governor, preferably a Bengali. Yahya replied it would be difficult to appoint a civilian governor in East Pakistan and not in West Pakistan, where Bhutto was standing in the wings, urging a transfer of power.

Yahya had just appointed Dr. A.M. Malik as his special assistant for Displaced Persons and Relief and Rehabilitation Operations in East

Pakistan. Yahya felt that the appointment would meet the need for civilian control in East Pakistan in that Malik would outrank the governor and could issue orders to the governor in the president's name.

Despite appointing the relief coordinator, Yahya refused to admit that the refugee problem was serious enough to deserve his special attention. Francis L. Kellogg, secretary of state's special assistant for Refugee and Migration Affairs, met with Yahya in Islamabad after visiting refugee camps in India in June. When Kellogg noted that he had seen streams of refugees on the Jessore-Kolkata Road, apparently coming out of East Pakistan, Yahya was skeptical. He said some people seem to be moving back and forth. Yahya thought that large numbers of people could not still be coming from East Pakistan to India.

Kellogg commented he had spoken to many individual refugees, selected randomly by him, with the help of interpreters. They were ordinary farmers and could not merely have been repeating a story they were told to relate. Moreover, most stated they had been trekking for ten days.

Yahya suggested that Kellogg go to East Pakistan and see for himself. There was no slaughter going on, the general insisted. Some armed opposition to the government was continuing, and it was meeting with armed response, Yahya said.

When Kellogg mentioned that India's foreign secretary had told the United States that "if the refugees can't move back, something must be done," Yahya set off an outburst against the Indians. He said Prime Minister Indira Gandhi must have instigated the current problems through a clandestine plotting with Mujib. Her people plotted against Pakistan. The Indians had armed the opposition. They had imposed a ban on overflights. Now India hoped to get large amounts of additional foreign aid on the pretext of providing for refugees to help it cope with its own existing problems.

Yahya said the impression might have been gained from the foreign press reports that East Pakistan was burning. "That is not so; it is not an inferno. East Pakistan is now open territory," Yahya asserted. The vast majority of the area was quiet, although border areas remained unstable.

Yahya referred to the action of the Indian Border Security Force and the Indian army in the border regions. The main support to the resistance thus far had come from the Border Security Force, India's frontier guards. But if the Indian army moved against East Pakistan, Yahya said matter-of-factly, "of course, fighting can't be limited to East Pakistan." He threatened a general war against India. He said the Indians were maintaining thirty to thirty-five training camps and arming East Pakistani civilians in them.

Responding to Kellogg's comment that the Indian foreign secretary had said it was not in India's interest to have an independent East Pakistan, Yahya said vehemently, "Kaul is a damned liar. His actions don't tally with what he says." Yahya said it was important to see what was actually happening. Pakistan's borders were being kept boiling. He asked Kellogg to visit the border areas and see from which direction the firing was coming. Then he could ask Kaul how the thousands of captured arms came to East Pakistan.

Kellogg repeated that none of the Indian officials with whom he had spoken had said they wanted the refugees to remain; nor had any one referred to a desire to see an independent East Pakistan. Bangladesh was never once mentioned to him, he told Yahya.

## Yahya Faces Pressure From World Leaders

By the time Yahya met Kellogg, he had started feeling increasing international pressure to reach a political solution. The latest pressure came from British Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas-Home, who linked Pakistan's foreign aid to reaching a political settlement. Yahya had already received a report from Hilaly about Blood's testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in Washington the previous week.

Feeling the pinch, Yahya wrote to Nixon on 28 June to express his disappointment over the donors' decision to withhold aid until Islamabad disclosed steps toward a political solution. The *New York Times* and the BBC had carried stories revealing the decision. Their veracity had been enhanced by the British foreign secretary's statement that "there can be no question of new British aid to Pakistan until we have firm evidence that real progress is being made towards a political settlement."

All these developments, Yahya told Nixon, had led to a strong and widespread public reaction in Pakistan. "In response to these developments, I had no choice but to declare in unequivocal terms in my broadcast of today that external assistance with political strings will be unacceptable to Pakistan."

One day later, Kissinger and Sisco talked on the phone in the light of the national security adviser's impending visit to South Asia. Kissinger remarked, "India wants to attack Pakistan." Sisco replied that the Indians wanted to keep the pot boiling. At the same time, Sisco noted, Yahya's proposed solution excluding the Awami League would not work, either. "It's like telling Ted Kennedy not to be a Democrat," Sisco commented. Kennedy, a U.S. senator and brother of President John F. Kennedy, visited the refugee camps in Kolkata and supported the Bengalis in 1971.

Sisco elaborated his point in a note to his boss, Rogers, which he sent on the same day: "It is doubtful that promises of maximum provincial autonomy will be enough to satisfy the Bengalis, who have in effect again been reminded that their earlier electoral decisions are not acceptable to the West Pakistani establishment. Thus, a genuine political accommodation remains the crux of Pakistan's internal crisis and Yahya's speech offers little basis for optimism over his chances of early success under the terms and conditions he has prescribed." Sisco added in a handwritten comment that "banning the Awami League makes a political accommodation almost impossible."

On 17 August, the National Security Council staff produced a study that showed South Asia was headed for a new war unless West and East Pakistan struck an accord and the refugees began returning from India by September or October. It predicted several scenarios that could develop over the following few months, and U.S. actions would partly depend on how the situation developed. The most likely scenarios included the following:

1. The Indian military forces will attack East Pakistan in an effort to seize and hold part of the area and drive out the West Pakistani forces.
2. India will step up direct support to enable the insurgents to seize and hold a portion of East Pakistan.
3. There will be a gradual process of escalation involving incidents along the East Pakistan-India border, with confusion as to who is most at fault.
4. West Pakistanis will initiate hostilities by attacking guerrilla sanctuaries in eastern India and/or Indian military support bases.
5. West Pakistanis, either to divert Indian attention or to show India's vulnerability, will try to stir up trouble in Kashmir along the ceasefire line, leading to the situation rapidly escalating to full-scale hostilities as in 1965.

Should war break out, it would be in the U.S. interest to keep third parties, particularly China and the Soviets, out of it. America would reap benefits by bringing a quick end to it, because a prolonged war could cause profound damage to the political, economic and social fabric of the South Asian nations.

Kissinger discussed the ideas with Nixon's foreign policy team the same day. The following exchange transpired, as recorded in the minutes of the Washington Special Action Group meeting on 17 August 1971 ( *Document 126, volume XI, South Asia crisis 1971, Department of State* )

Kissinger: "Do you think the Indians will attack?"

Helms: "My personal feeling is that they will not do so."

Kissinger asked Sisco: "What do you think?"

Sisco: "I don't think they will launch an attack across the border. However, I believe they will feel free to support the liberation movement in East Pakistan now that they have the treaty with the Soviets. This will be more likely to happen if the liberation movement picks up steam, the relief problem continues and there is no political accommodation. My reaction is that in no circumstances will the Pakistanis initiate hostilities in the West. If the Indian objective is to achieve a Bangla Desh that they can work with, they will continue to support the liberation movement."

Kissinger: "Are the Chinese reinforcing?"

Helms: "No."

Moorer: "There are no indications yet that they are. We do know that the Indians have activated some airfields near West Pakistan."

Kissinger: "How quickly would the Chinese be able to reinforce?"

Moorer: "It would be very difficult for them."

Helms: "The terrain is bad, and they don't have the necessary equipment. We would know ahead of time."

Kissinger: "Did they reinforce in 1962?"

Helms: "Yes."

Kissinger: "Did we know?"

Helms: "Yes."

Kissinger: "What did the Indians think was going to happen?"

Helms: "As I recall, the Indians had sort of decided to take on the Chinese before the attack took place."

Kissinger: "Thus, their surprise was the result of a judgmental factor?"

Helms: "In that part of the world one still has the problem of passions outrunning good judgment."

Kissinger: "Passions don't have to run very far to do that in India."

Irwin: "If Joe's scenario is correct, what steps could be taken to reduce that possibility?"

Moorer: "Doesn't it all boil down to whether the Indians take overt action? The Pakistanis are outnumbered four to one. They certainly are not going to attack."

Irwin: "What would cause the Indians to take action?"

Moorer: "The emotion you were talking about. Also the refugee problem"

Irwin: "There are several possible contingencies that could cause the Indians to act. There could be a famine in East Pakistan, which would stimulate a large wave of refugees. Failure to reach a political accommodation would be another factor. The execution of Mujibur Rahman might touch off something."

Kissinger: "Do we know what is going on at the trial?"

Moorer: "It is expected to last two months."

Helms: "Until October."

Irwin: "All we can do with India is to urge restraint and threaten."

Helms: "I think the U.S. policy has been just right on this occasion. We are urging the Indians not to attack, we are taking action to prevent famine, and we are getting the United Nations engaged. It doesn't look like we are doing a lot, but what else is there to do? The only other thing we should do is get Ted Kennedy home."

Kennedy, chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Refugees, was in India at that time on an eight-day fact-finding mission.

Kissinger: "I'm not sure they would agree about that [Kennedy's return] upstairs."

Sisco: "In this contingency paper, there are a lot of unilateral steps indicated. I think we ought to realize that in case of war there is really very little that we can do unilaterally. We will have to rely on what parallel interests the United States, the U.S.S.R. and China may have in localizing the war. What bothers me is that we have channels to the Soviets, but we have to find ways to talk to the Chinese."

Kissinger: "We can figure that out."

Sisco: "By ourselves we have a limited capacity to influence the situation."

Kissinger: "What should we tell the Soviets and Chinese that we want them to do?"

Sisco: "Before or after hostilities?"

Kissinger: "Before and after. Has anyone talked to the Soviet Union?"

Sisco: "It is difficult to say exactly what we would tell them at the present juncture."

Kissinger: "Couldn't we say, cool your new friends? Am I missing something here? Why not say that to them?"

Helms: "Sure. Why not? Conversation is cheap."

Irwin: "I see no problem. At some point, we might move to that. The secretary [Rogers] was planning on seeing the Soviets, but the Soviet treaty with India intervened."

Kissinger: "You shake your head. Why?"

Helms: "This is the time [to talk to the Soviets]. If you don't turn that stone and a serious problem develops later, you will kick yourself."

Kissinger: "Is there something going on that eludes me, Joe? Why are you so mysterious?"

Sisco: "I have no problem with talking to the Soviets. Two weeks ago, we prepared talking points for that."

Kissinger: "Well, can I assume that we [the White House] will be told if you decide to approach the Soviets?"

Sisco: "Naturally we will have to talk to the secretary [Rogers] about this."

Irwin: "Certainly."

Kissinger: "What should we tell the Chinese? It is so out of character for you to be reticent."

Sisco: "We have such good direct relations with the Pakistanis that we don't have to go to the Chinese to ask them to urge restraint on the Pakistanis. I don't see any immediate need to talk to the Chinese."

Kissinger: "When you think the time has come, will you give us a hint? A reticent Joe Sisco is unknown. Usually when you come here you have already done whatever is to be done. Maybe you have decided to change your strategy from one of telling us afterward to not telling us at all. Anyway, we assume the State Department will let us know when a message is to be passed to the Chinese. What do we do when a war starts?"

Moorer: "As for evacuation, there are 7,698 U.S. nationals to be evacuated from India, some 2,000 from West Pakistan, and 242 in East Pakistan."

Sisco: "We should look at the evacuation plans."

Kissinger: "Can we get these plans in shape?"

Sisco: "Some of the things we do in connection with evacuation are standard. We need to get suggestions on what to tell the Soviets and Chinese."

Kissinger: "Can someone study what we mean when we say we are going to cut out economic aid [to India]? We should look at the consequences."

Irwin: "What we do is cut down on Indian possibilities for economic development. This increases the burden on the Indian governmental system, may stop their democratic evolution and might lead them to make a pact with the Soviet Union."

Kissinger: "Can we cut off aid through the consortium?"

Sisco: "We will produce a paper on this. Some of the steps might be to delay a commitment on the 1972 development loan program, to mobilize other aid donors to delay their assistance, to delay signing a PL-480 agreement, and to stop things that are in the pipeline."

Kissinger: "Could you do that [prepare a paper]? We will also be getting talking points for the Soviets and Chinese both before and after an attack. You will let us know what you are doing on this, and we in turn will let you know about anything we are doing here that may affect the situation."

Sisco: "We and the Chinese and the Russians have certain common interests in this."

Kissinger: "We can't have solo efforts on this."

Irwin: "Yes, we should coordinate as much as possible with the Chinese and Soviets."

Kissinger: "I mean bureaucratically."

Irwin: "Oh. I was looking at it from a somewhat broader perspective."

Helms: "Can we assume that the Chinese know about our efforts to keep Pakistan together?"

Sisco: "I think they ought to know that our basic policy is to be helpful in maintaining the integrity of Pakistan."

Kissinger: "I agree. We should make sure that they don't misread us. Everyone can get together and assemble these talking points. Let us have those for the Chinese fairly soon."

By opting for the united Pakistan posture, Kissinger and his colleagues ignored intelligence estimates only to end up in a fiasco in South Asia. They neither helped Pakistan nor boosted U.S. interests. On 6 December, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, chief of Naval Operations, expressed his displeasure with the panel's policy prescriptions. He wondered aloud what would be the outcome of America's South Asian policy. What he saw was not a pretty picture for Washington.

"We have come out on the side of the Pakistanis. East Pakistan will go down and it will look like we are ineffective allies. The U.S.S.R. will gain with the Indians. In the short term, the military balance in the Indian Ocean area will go against us," the admiral said.



## U.S. Warns India: Don't Start War

As early as May 1971, Sisco saw India and Pakistan going to war over East Bengal. The escalation could develop in two ways, he told Rogers on 18 May. If India felt intolerable economic, political and internal security pressures from the influx of the refugees, it might strike against East Pakistan to end the struggle. Alternatively, the West Pakistanis could attack India if they felt that they had to halt cross-border activities by the Bengalis from Indian sanctuaries to keep their control over East Pakistan.

Sisco thought Pakistan's steps to restore normalcy and strike a peaceful deal with the Bengalis were critical to averting an escalation. Unless the conditions returned to normal, the refugee flow would continue. Without a political compromise, India's support for cross-border operations would go on, potentially making the situation dangerous, he cautioned.

On 23 May, Kissinger told Nixon that India was amassing soldiers along the Pakistan border.

Nixon asked, "Which one, East or West?" Kissinger replied, "East." Kissinger had already instructed the U.S. ambassador to let New Delhi know that Washington opposed India's invasion of Pakistan.

Nixon supported Kissinger. He said, "If India went in there with military action, by God we will cut off economic aid." Kissinger emphasized that Washington could not afford to see the Pakistan government thrown out now, "given the other things we are doing" referring to America's secret contacts with China.

Two days later, Kissinger received a memo from Hoskinson and Richard Kennedy, member of the National Security Council (NSC) staff. "There are some disturbing indications that India and Pakistan are moving closer to the brink of a new war. Neither side really wants a war at this point, but they are drifting in this direction." The NSC said mortar barrages and small-arms fire had been exchanged frequently across the East Pakistan-India border for the past weeks. The big Indian army forces in the area were on high alert and the situation appeared very tense.

On the West Pakistan-India border, intelligence reports indicated, the Indians were taking military preparations, such as dispersal of fighter aircraft in the potential combat area and perhaps the movement of additional combat troops and armor into forward areas. The Pakistanis reportedly had their forces in forward positions along the border, too.

In addition, Gandhi reportedly had ordered her army to prepare a plan for a rapid takeover of East Pakistan. She was particularly interested in an "Israeli-type lightening [sic] thrust" that would present the world with a *fait accompli*.

India's campaign at home and abroad to bring attention to the refugee crisis gave the Americans another clue that Gandhi was preparing for war. Besides, her warning before parliament – that "Pakistan must provide "credible guarantees" for the return and future safety of the refugees" – raised suspicions in Washington.

America got yet another hint when Gandhi issued an even stronger threat: "Unless the great powers take action to remedy the situation, India will be 'constrained to take all measures that might be necessary' to safeguard its own well-being."

One day after Hoskinson and Kennedy issued the memo, the secretary of state sent a report to Nixon, noting that the possibility of a war seemed more likely now than before. "The situation in East Pakistan is evolving to the point where we now believe it is possible that it could touch off a war between India and Pakistan. In the event of such a conflict, the possibility of Chinese pressure on India along their border, followed by increased Soviet military assistance to India, cannot be excluded," Rogers wrote.

Differing with Nixon's position, Rogers hinted at his preference to press Yahya to solve the crisis politically and thus avoid a war. "We agree that President Yahya is not likely to take steps to bring about a political accommodation until he realizes, himself, how essential it is. We cannot force him to this realization and, therefore, we are not imposing political conditions on our assistance. We believe, however, that we should avoid taking actions which might ease the internal pressures on him to take such steps on his own accord."

In the afternoon of the same day, Kissinger chaired a twenty-five-minute meeting of the Washington Special Action Group, a panel that implemented the Nixon administration's policies. It was attended by officials from the State Department, the Pentagon, the Joint Chiefs and the National Security Council staff.

Kissinger asked the panel, "What do you think the Indians really want in East Pakistan?"

Van Hollen replied, "The Indians want, first, a cessation of the civil strife in East Pakistan so as to stem the flow of the refugees. Second, they want a moderate, independent regime in East Pakistan. They're concerned that over a period of time the radical element there may take power and link up with the radicals in India."

Kissinger: "They're aiming for an independent Bangladesh under moderate leadership?"

Johnson: "Yes."

Van Hollen: "Until 25 March, India saw its interests served by a united Pakistan in which the Bengali element would be the dominant. When the Pakistani military moved into East Pakistan, India's estimate of their own best interests shifted, and they now favor an independent Bangladesh under a moderate leadership."

On 29 May, India's ambassador met with Kissinger in the White House. Hoskinson also attended the thirty-five-minute meeting. When Jha briefed Kissinger on the latest situation, the crisis had assumed a new dimension. Jha first talked about the refugee issue, saying it was not simply a question of money and relief. India could no longer absorb so many people, Jha said, and it wanted to find a way to send them back into East Pakistan. Jha warned that "tensions are high" both politically and socially. A high percentage of the refugees were Hindus and that there were communal conflicts between the refugees and the local population. This was particularly serious in West Bengal. Jha called the situation "very explosive."

Kissinger asked what the choices were, adding, "You can't go to war over the refugees."

Jha said some people wanted to arm the refugees and send them back into East Pakistan. Others advocated bringing pressure on Yahya. The prevailing high level of tension could result in serious disruptions in the already unstable West Bengal. It could also pose a serious threat to Indo-Pak relations, which in turn would have a "backwash" effect on Indo-U.S. affairs. Jha said he hoped the president could reply to the prime minister's letter in such a way as to convey support for India in international forums and inform her of what the United States was advising Yahya.

Kissinger asked what the United States could do, noting Yahya claimed he wanted a political settlement.

Jha said what India needed was a sense of movement in that direction. "We need confirmation that he is moving toward a political settlement," he said.

Kissinger said East Pakistan's evolution should be "gradual and most delicately handled". He told Jha he was unsure if an "independent East Pakistan is in India's interest."

Jha replied India did not favor Pakistan's breakup, nor could he see Pakistan surviving. India feared guerrilla activity and China's involvement eventually in East Pakistan, an eventually that he predicted would tear the Muslim nation apart.

Kissinger advised the ambassador to tell Gandhi, "We are concerned and are doing here what we can with a low visibility."

Jha said Gandhi wanted to keep the situation under control, but needed a feeling of confidence from Nixon's reply to her letter.

Kissinger assured the response would reflect Washington was "trying to move in a constructive way".

Jha again stressed the need for some indication of support for India in international organizations.

Kissinger responded that Nixon had "personal influence" with Pakistan, which needed to be used privately.

By June, the Americans had started voicing their opinion that Pakistan's partition was unavoidable. On 3 June, the U.S. ambassador to India told Kissinger, "East Pakistan will eventually become independent." He advocated that America move to resolve the crisis and retain its influence with the Bengalis.

But when Nixon and Kissinger, who were deeply submerged in their secret China plan, discussed Keating's outlook on 4 June, they disagreed with the ambassador. Kissinger said, "It was important to buoy up Yahya for at least another month, while Pakistan served as the gateway to China."

Nixon, widely known for his disdain of Indian leaders, replied: "Even apart from the Chinese thing, I wouldn't do that to help the Indians. The Indians are no goddamn good."

Nixon fumed that every U.S. ambassador who went to India "got sucked in", including Keating.

## **Bangladesh: "Ripe Field" For Communism**

Kissinger saw no sense in Keating's advice. "If East Pakistan becomes independent, it is going to become a cesspool. It is going to be 100 million people, they have the lowest standard of living in Asia, no resources. They're going to become a ripe field for communist infiltration. And, then they're going to bring pressure on India because of West Bengal. So the Indians in their usual idiotic way are playing for little stakes, unless they have in the back of their minds that they could turn East Pakistan into a sort of protectorate that they could control from Calcutta."

Nixon concluded that all the Indians had in mind was to damage Pakistan.

On 6 June, Farland met with Yahya. He told the general that the continued stream of refugees indicated a serious situation in East Pakistan. "I pointed out that the embassy continued to receive reports of Hindu villages being attacked by the army, that fear is pervasive and that until this situation changes the refugees will continue to cross over into India," Farland said in a cable to Washington.

He cautioned Yahya that the Hindu exodus, if not checked, could lead to a military clash with India. "I said that the continued massive flow of the refugees remains the most explosive aspect of the East Pakistan situation."

Yahya did not admit the Hindu repression. He said "he was equally seized with concern over the refugee situation and realized all of its ramifications and its potential for the direst of developments." He told Farland that every effort was being made to seal the borders and to expedite the return of the refugees. He promised to give this matter his continuing attention. He insisted that his information indicated the outflow had substantially decreased and that many were moving back into East Pakistan.

Yahya's assessment differed vastly with reports reaching Washington. On 9 June, Irwin painted a bleak picture of the East Pakistan situation. In a memo to Nixon, he said the people, fearful of army action, were hesitant to return to work, whether in government offices or the private sector.

There was evidence of an increasingly organized insurgency, including guerrilla disruption of transport and commerce as well as intimidation of those who ventured to cooperate with the martial law administration. Yahya's political initiatives had thus far failed to draw any significant response. There was a continued low level of law and order, and a partial breakdown of the local government apparatus, outside major urban areas where the military had achieved some security.

With no progress in sight in East Pakistan, and India gearing up for war, the Nixon administration sought to use its influence to prevent hostilities from breaking out. On 11 June, Kissinger met with India's ambassador to Washington, and cautioned Jha, "If India took unilateral military action, it would have to mean the end of any assistance on our part. It would turn the issue into an international problem involving China, the Soviet Union and other great powers, in which the Bengal problem would soon be submerged."

Defending India's position, Jha said the presence of six million refugees in most heavily populated states could shift the voting balance for the communists, especially in West Bengal. "It was a matter in India of its internal stability – there was nothing that the government wanted to do less than to go to war, but something had to be done."

When Kissinger asked how the situation could be resolved, Jha replied: "What was needed was a political conversation and a political solution, which he personally believed were unlikely except on the basis of independence for East Pakistan." By June, India had become convinced that the only possible solution to the crisis was the creation of Bangladesh.

As Kissinger and Jha talked in Washington, a furious U.S. chargé d'affaires in India sent a blunt note to the State Department on 11 June. Noting that many refugees were still pouring in to India, Stone said, "This should be evidence enough that no matter what noises President Yahya

may make about the restoration of normalcy, he has not yet done anything to effectively impede the reign of terror and brutality of the Pakistan army, the root cause of the refugee exodus. I believe the United States, whether we like it or not, bears very heavy responsibility for the continuing deterioration of the situation. Unless forceful and effective action is promptly undertaken to stem the refugee flow, the government of India would be forced into an act of desperation.”

Scolding Washington for its hands-off posture vis-à-vis East Pakistan, Stone also said, “We are the key factor in all of Yahya’s calculations for the immediate future. Despite his apparent lack of realism in recognizing the facts of life in East Pakistan, it is difficult for me to believe he does not perceive that the mainstay for the survival of his government is the continued flow of support and resources from the [U.S. government.] To hold this card in our hand without playing it seems to me to be indefensible in the present situation.”

He recommended that Washington use all the leverage available to pressure Pakistan into halting without further delay the repression in the East wing. “Under present conditions, for us to call on India to show restraint amounts to putting the shoe on the wrong foot.”

Displeased with this bitter comment, Nixon summoned the ambassador from India for consultation. On 16 June, Keating briefed the president ahead of the Indian foreign minister’s visit to Washington. Keating told Nixon that a political settlement was unlikely unless Yahya was ready to deal with the Awami League.

“The old Pakistan is through,” the ambassador flatly told the president.

But Nixon remained transfixed on his policy not to disturb Yahya before his secret China mission was over. He wanted good relations with India, but not at Pakistan’s expense. “It would not be in our interest” to contribute to the collapse of Pakistan, Nixon said. But he agreed that Pakistan might collapse within the following months.

After Keating left the Oval Office, Nixon and Kissinger continued their discussion. Kissinger advised his boss to tell India’s foreign minister that Washington would give aid to India, but not from Pakistan’s budget.

“It would be considered such an insult to Yahya that the whole deal would be off,” Kissinger cautioned, referring to Pakistan’s role in America’s efforts to develop contacts with China.

“It just may be that the poor son of a bitch can’t survive,” Nixon commented, referring to Yahya.

On 16 June, Swaran Singh met with Nixon as part of his worldwide tour. Washington was Singh’s final stop on a ten-day tour of major world capitals, including Moscow, London, Paris, Bonn, and Ottawa, undertaken to reinforce the seriousness with which India viewed the situation in East Pakistan.

During his meeting with Nixon, Singh told the president that Pakistan “was reaching the point of no return”. Nixon asked Singh to outline an outcome that would be in India’s best interest. He asked if India envisioned an independent country in East Pakistan. Singh replied: “We have no fixed position on that.”

When Singh met Rogers the same day, he said India believed that “there is some prospect that if the government of Pakistan selects proper course, unity of Pakistan can be maintained.” India “did not advocate any particular political solution which might be autonomy under six points, federation, confederation or independence. This [is] up to Pakistan to decide upon, but India does wish to end the conflict, which both weakens Pakistan and causes a refugee burden for India.”

When Sisco asked how Bangladesh leaders’ insistence upon independence was the only solution related to India’s approach, Singh replied, “India had carefully avoided committing itself to any particular solution. It has not recognized Bangladesh nor decided that Bangladesh must be a separate entity, but one cannot expect East Bengalis to abandon the idea of independence until they see a real possibility of an acceptable alternative.”

Welcoming this view, Rogers stated, “We can urge Yahya to try to work out a political solution, but we cannot urge him to accept separatism. We can only advocate solution which has some prospect for success and point out to Yahya difficulties which he would face if he did not seek an accommodation.”

On 21 June, David Schneider, country director for India at the State Department, sent a letter to Galen Stone, the U.S. chargé in New Delhi, assessing the impact of Singh’s visit to Washington. Overall, he felt, Singh had made a positive impression. State Department officials were surprised by Singh’s moderate approach to the East Pakistan crisis. “What particularly impressed the secretary, Joe Sisco and others was that, according to Swaran Singh, the government of India had not hit on any one exclusive solution for solving the East Pakistan problem. It admitted of the possibility of a political accommodation within a united Pakistan. We welcomed this here because it meant that the United States and India could operate within the same basic strategy.”

Yahya, however, saw India’s concerns about the refugees as a mere ploy to impose a political solution upon Islamabad. He made this point clear in a letter to Nixon on 18 June where he said, “It is most unfortunate that this humanitarian question should be cynically turned into political propaganda by India, and that the Indian government should use the problem of the displaced persons as an instrument of pressure on Pakistan to impose a political government of Indian choice in East Pakistan. No government could yield to such blackmail.”

Yahya saw India’s demand as an indication that war was coming. He told Nixon: “As I have repeatedly stressed, war would solve nothing and we do not want a conflict with India. It remains our earnest hope that India will not resort to a conflict. The danger is that through constant repetition of threats, the Indian leaders may succeed in creating an atmosphere and mood in their country which could inevitably lead to a conflict.”

He complained that the Indian army had indulged in numerous aggressive activities from across the border in previous days. He said reports confirmed an increasing concentration of Indian forces. Neutral observers saw camps in India to train saboteurs to infiltrate East Pakistan. He asked Nixon to use his “influence with India to persuade her to desist from actions” that could lead to a breach of peace.

## India “Did Not Know How Not To Go To War”

In July, Kissinger came to South Asia to gain first-hand knowledge of the situation. On 6 July, he met with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s personal secretary, P.N. Haksar. Haksar was furious over America’s military aid to Pakistan. Kissinger sought to quiet down Haksar, telling him that Washington would try to work silently over the next few months to encourage a settlement of the refugee problem.

Haksar conceded that the United States could not respond to public furor, but hinted that India had decided nothing short of military action

would bring this crisis to an end. "India did not want to go to war, but it did not know how not to go to war," he said.

Kissinger later recalled telling Haksar that the Indians were just making lots of noise over the military aid to Pakistan to set up for war. After conversations with Haksar and Kaul, Kissinger concluded that India was "playing power politics with cold calculations".

One day after his discussion with Haksar and Kaul, Kissinger met with Gandhi, who was accompanied by Haksar and another aide. Keating and Saunders joined Kissinger. Meeting privately with Kissinger for fifteen minutes, Gandhi told him she did not wish to use force and was "willing to accept any suggestions" from the United States.

On his part, Kissinger hinted about America's secret overtures to China, assuring Gandhi they were not directed against India but rather part of Washington's global policy. Kissinger later wrote that he had dropped the hint about China to avoid "future charges that, on an issue of vital concern to them, we had not at least confided our general intent".

When the other participants joined the discussion, Kissinger asked whether the settlement in East Pakistan must include Mujib. Gandhi said the deal must be between East and West Pakistan; after all, it was not an Indo-Pak problem and India would not have been involved except for the refugees.

Kissinger stressed the importance of avoiding "extreme measures" for another few months to give the present pressures a chance to work on Pakistan. Gandhi gave the assurance that India did not want to take extreme measures. What India would do would be a question of how the situation developed and what it could do. It was true that the shipment of a few arms to Pakistan did not make much practical difference, but in psychological terms, the United States had made the situation more difficult.

Pakistan, according to Gandhi, had felt all these years that it would get support from the United States no matter what it did. This had encouraged an "adventurous policy," she said, adding that India was "not remotely desirous of territory". It was irritating, she stressed, to have the Pakistanis base the whole survival of their country on hostility to India. "If they really had the good of Islam at heart, they would think of the sixty million Muslims in India also."

When Kissinger met with India's external affairs minister on 7 July, Singh appeared more resigned to the prospect of a conflict with Pakistan. Singh told Kissinger that Yahya's comments on Mujib in his 28 June address were unhelpful. He feared that a settlement along the lines of a confederal relationship appeared to have been nipped in the bud by Yahya's statement. It appeared now that the constitution would not be drafted by the elected lawmakers. It was also unclear what role political parties or Mujib could play.

## India To Accept Deal Minus Mujib

During his trip to New Delhi, Kissinger also met with Jagjivan Ram, India's defense minister. At Kissinger's request, Ram assessed the Chinese military threat to India. Kissinger observed that China might intervene on Pakistan's behalf, should India and Pakistan go to war. Kissinger assured Ram that the United States would take a grave view of any Chinese move against India, a declaration that was in contrast to a warning earlier made by the national security adviser to Jha in Washington.

Kissinger had told India's ambassador to Washington before his trip to New Delhi, that if war broke out between India and Pakistan, and China got involved on Pakistan's side, "We would be unable to help you against China."

When Kissinger arrived in Pakistan, he met with Sultan Khan, the foreign secretary, M.M. Ahmad, economic adviser to Yahya, and Agha Hilaly, Pakistan's ambassador to Washington. Saunders joined Kissinger. Kissinger told the Pakistanis, "I do not consider it impossible that the Indians could take military action."

Sultan Khan realized the problem needed to be defused quickly because it could pressure India into making a rash action.

Kissinger suggested that it would help if Pakistan could make a comprehensive proposal rather than merely dribble out bits and pieces of its action, as well as internationalize its response to the refugee problem by inviting international observers. Kissinger felt it was important to defuse the issue of the refugees so that it could be separated from that of the political structure of East Pakistan; linking the two would only prolong the current situation, which could lead to war and that would be a catastrophe.

Pakistan's foreign secretary asked what Kissinger felt would be the Indian rationale for war. Kissinger replied that the seven million refugees were an intolerable burden on an already overburdened Indian economy, particularly in eastern India. India saw an enormous danger of communal riots. The Indians just feel they must "do something". India felt that it would win any military confrontation, Kissinger told the Pakistanis.

Sultan Khan told Kissinger about the efforts being undertaken to arrange a meeting between Yahya and Gandhi. Iran's Shah had offered to provide a neutral ground for an Indo-Pak meeting, but Gandhi had rejected it. Similarly, Nikolai Podgorny, Soviet president, and Aleksei Kosygin, Soviet prime minister, had wanted to arrange a meeting in June 1970. India did not reply until October, when it said a summit meeting was inappropriate then. New Delhi suggested the discussion begin at the secretary level.

"The lady is unpredictable. She is maneuvering for a fight," Hilaly commented on Indian Prime Minister Gandhi.

On 22 July, Rogers told Hilaly he had warned Swaran Singh against letting increasing incidents on the Pakistan-India border get out of hand. This indicated to Hilaly that the United States was maintaining its pressure on India. Kissinger told Hilaly the next day that when he had met Jha in San Clemente, he had also made it clear that the United States would view "with extreme disfavor", any Indian move to begin war.

Hilaly asked, "So Jha came to the West Coast. Did he ask about China's intentions?"

Kissinger, speaking slowly and avoiding a precise response, said Jha had just wanted to get a general fill-in. He said he had told Jha that America vehemently opposed any moves that could lead to war. He had told him that a complete political solution would take longer than working out a plan for the refugees, and thus the Indians should not make the refugee return a condition for forging a political settlement.

## Pakistan Crisis: Superpower Game

The United States made its first foray into South Asia during World War II when British power in India was dwindling. Washington worried that the region could fall into the hands of Japan, potentially hurting its own war efforts. Since the departure of Britain from India – and from the world scene as a major power – the main factor guiding the then newly emerging superpower's policy towards the subcontinent was its perception of the region's relevance to its global geopolitical and strategic goals. America's South Asia policy was shaped not so much by the region's interests, but by U.S. interests versus Soviet Union and China. The United States mainly sought to prevent the absorption of the area into the communist orbit. Its early thrust was against advancing communism in general; eventually, the emphasis would shift to countering Soviet expansionism. Guided by its strategic interests, the United States tended to view regional conflicts largely from a global perspective.

A report on the then emerging situation of India, Pakistan and Iran in the State Department Bulletin on 3 April 1950, summed up the serious thinking in Washington about South Asia. It said, "The schism that led to the breakup of the old India was very deep . . . The development of a Pakistan-India entente cordiale appears remote. Moreover, the vigor and methods which have characterized India's execution of its policy of consolidating the princely states and its inflexible attitude with regard to Kashmir may indicate national traits which in time, if not controlled, could make India Japan's successor in Asiatic imperialism. In such a circumstance a strong Muslim block under the leadership of Pakistan and friendly to the U.S. might afford a desirable balance of power in Asia."

America sought to prevent Asia's domination by a single power that could pose a threat to it. Towards that end, it offered to help South Asian countries develop economically and as relatively open societies. As part of America's game plan, its policymakers made it clear that if the free world was to be protected from communism – whether it be Russian or Chinese – Pakistan must be an integral part of the Western strategic arsenal. The United States concluded that it had a vital interest in ensuring Pakistan's independence and its continuing alignment with the free world in collective security against communism. It was, therefore, necessary to help Pakistan to maintain a military force capable of meeting such threat, and to maintain levels of economic activity and standards of living capable of supporting America's interests in South Asia.

Olaf Caroe, a former governor of the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan and foreign secretary of the British-Indian government, advised the Americans in his book, *Wells of Power*, that Western defense of the Middle East should be based on Pakistan, just as British defense of the Middle East had been based upon control of the subcontinent. America also realized that it would be easier to defend the Middle East with Pakistan as ally.

Thus Pakistan was the only country in South Asia and within the Muslim world that participated in all of the US-led military alliances in the 1950s. Overall, Pakistan's purpose in joining those alliances was not to contain communism but to strengthen its own defense and bargaining position vis-à-vis India, its arch adversary.

For the US, the military alliances with Pakistan became a strategic necessity and America got branded in India "as a friend of Pakistan and opposed to India." This perception allowed the Indians to believe that America's patronisation of Pakistan meant denial of proper status to New Delhi, thus pushing it towards the Soviet Union.

Subsequently, India's willingness to expand relations with the communist countries enhanced their international stature and made other Asian countries more receptive to Soviet overtures. India's policy paid off during the 1971 war because the Indo-Soviet treaty successfully neutralized the United States and China. America and China gave verbal support to Pakistan, but both were helpless to defend Pakistan's territorial integrity as State Department officials and American public opinion opposed Pakistan. Although the Nixon administration tilted to Pakistan, it was simply to avoid war in the region. The Americans had accepted the inevitability of the creation of Bangladesh, but Nixon wanted to stop West Pakistan's anticipated breakup. To this end, America told the Soviets that it would take tougher action if they didn't restrain India.

On 9 July 1971, Alexander Haig, the deputy national security adviser, sent a memo to Nixon on the Indian foreign minister's visit to Moscow, saying Kosygin had agreed to arm the Bengali guerrillas. Singh had sought Russia's military protection against China's threatening gestures. Kosygin responded favourably, although he requested a formal request from Gandhi.

Haig explained to Nixon that the Indians were still being haunted by the 1962 humiliation, notwithstanding their brave talk about being able to defend against China and fighting on two other fronts against Pakistan. This could be why Singh regarded his Moscow visit as "a major political development". Gandhi, too, was pleased with Moscow's response, but Haig suspected the Russians would not aid India because "it would be a major break in the Soviet policy," which committed Moscow to supporting communist regimes.

### China Hints Action If India Attacks East Pakistan

On 10 July 1971, Kissinger and Chou En-lai discussed in Beijing that how China would react in the East Pakistan situation. Chou implied that China would intervene if India undermined Pakistan's control over East Pakistan. He said, "In our opinion, if India continues on its present course in disregard of the world opinion, it will continue to go on recklessly. We, however, support the stand of Pakistan. This is known to the world. If [the Indians] are bent on provoking such a situation, then we cannot sit idly by."

Kissinger told Chou that while Washington maintained "friendly relations" with India, in this case, the Nixon administration sided with Yahya. He, however, was restrained in his comment on how the U.S. would respond should India attack East Pakistan. Kissinger said, "We strongly oppose any military action to solve the problems of East Pakistan. And, if India takes military action in East Pakistan, we would strongly and publicly disapprove of it."

On 16 July Nixon summoned his top advisers to the Western White House for a session that lasted more than an hour. Among the ten

participants were Kissinger, Rogers, Helms, and Moorer. Opening his discussion on South Asia, Nixon vented his anger against the Indians, describing them as “a slippery, treacherous people.” He felt that the Indians would like nothing better than to use the East Pakistan tragedy to destroy Pakistan. If the Indians believed that they could get away with it, he fumed, they would like to undercut the Pakistani government.

After finishing his verbal salvos against the Indians, Nixon asked what restraints could be applied to them. “We could not allow – over the next three-four months until “we take this journey” to Peking – a war in South Asia, if we can possibly avoid it,” he told his aides.

Turning his attention to the situation on the ground, Nixon asked whether Pakistan would fight if it were attacked. Helms replied, “Yes.”

But the Pakistanis would not attack India, Moorer interjected.

Helms stressed that the pressures were building in India to go to war.

Nixon realized things were spiraling downward. The situation “smells bad,” he said, adding that the Indians were not to be trusted.

Kissinger jumped in, saying, “The Indians seemed bent on war. Everything they have done is an excuse for war. Whatever their objective might ostensibly be, they appear to be thinking of using the war as a way of destroying Pakistan.”

Kissinger believed that if East Pakistan were attacked, Yahya would start an all-out war and that he would lose it.

What would China do? Nixon queried.

Kissinger incorrectly predicted that the Chinese would come in, a comment perhaps he based on Chou En-lai’s promise in Beijing. He said the Indians were “insufferably arrogant.” He quoted India’s army chief, General Sam Manekshaw, as saying India would take on East Pakistan, West Pakistan and China – all at once.

Kissinger said the way the Indians were hooking the refugee solution to an overall political solution suggested that they were using the refugees for political purposes. But Yahya lacked the imagination to solve the situation in East Pakistan in time. Over a longer period, 70,000 West Pakistanis could not hold down East Pakistan, Kissinger observed.

Kissinger had urged Yahya to develop a generous settlement on the refugee issue to deny India an excuse for intervention. He worried that an outbreak of war involving Pakistan, India and China, would send all U.S. efforts to build ties with China, down the drain.

Rogers said the tragedy was that Pakistan, as currently constituted, could not survive.

On 23 July Kissinger held a Senior Review Group meeting to discuss South Asia. Helms and Moorer were among the nineteen participants from the State Department, the CIA, the Joint Chiefs, the Pentagon and the National Security Council.

Kissinger began by reiterating Nixon’s determination to delay the war for at least three to four months. “The Indians should be under no illusion that if they go to war there will be unshirted hell to pay. We want to avoid war and we will do the right things to prevent it,” he vowed.

Sisco felt that the ball was in America’s court. “The way we handle the Indians can either deter them or move them toward war. If we assume that the only way to move the Indians is with a stick, I don’t think we understand the Indian psychology. We need a combination of carrot and stick and some concentration on the proper way to use our leverage. Psychology and mood are important in terms of making the Indians believe that we are doing what we can to be helpful.”

Kissinger appeared determined to execute Nixon’s plan. He said, “We are quite prepared to do that, but the Indians must not be under any misapprehension. We will do everything we can to ease the refugee problem as long as India understands the consequences of any rash action on their part.”

Irwin observed that the Indians remained suspicious of the United States – a trait that had marked Indo-U.S. relations since at least the 1940s, when Britain ruled India. “They think we are pro-Pakistan. They will understand the pressure if they believe we seriously want to help. But such pressure won’t work unless we continue to push the Pakistanis so that the flow of refugees slows or stops, with some possibility of the return of the refugees to East Pakistan or the achievement of some political accommodation.”

Kissinger then said he had no doubts this was a profoundly emotional issue to the Indians. “My impression is that the Indians have a tendency to build to a hysteria from which they won’t know how to escape. They could bring about a major confrontation, and I am not confident that China would not come in the circumstances.”

Irwin reminded the group of Jha’s comment that America economically helped India but never politically. “They’re really schizophrenic. They appreciate what we have done for them, but are distrustful of us. Of course, they have never been with us politically.”

Sisco interjected, saying many Americans had a wrong impression about India. “When many Americans think of India they think of Krishna Menon, and that’s not an inaccurate image.” Menon, Nehru’s left-leaning defense minister who often showered America with bristling attacks, tilted India’s military establishment towards the Soviet Union.

As for the Pakistanis, Kissinger had few kind words for them, because the generals in Islamabad failed to grasp what they really faced. But he made an accurate prediction on when India would attack Pakistan and how New Delhi would finish the war. “On the Pakistani side, it is my impression that Yahya and his group would never win any prizes for high IQs or for the subtlety of their political comprehension. They are loyal, blunt soldiers, but I think they have a real intellectual problem in understanding why East Pakistan should not be part of West Pakistan. You will never get the acceptance of the Awami League from the present structure. If India attacks, it will be in the next six months. The Pakistanis will not put the Awami League back in power in the next six months. It seems inevitable that any political process will end with some degree of autonomy for East Bengal. Can we get a program that separates the refugee issue while still leaving a vista for political accommodation? The Pakistanis don’t have the political imagination to do this themselves.”

Helms seconded that Yahya simply had no political solution.

Sisco said, “If the Indians come to the conclusion that there is no hope of any accommodation, this continued frustration could lead to what we would consider an irrational Indian action.”

Kissinger said India had the right to insist on any particular political formula as a precondition for the return of the refugees.

Irwin said, “I know the prime minister told you they would not insist on any formula, but Jha is insisting on the reinstitution of the Awami League.”

Kissinger replied, “We could press Yahya on that, but not on accepting the Awami League. If we press him on the Awami League and he refused, that could be the basis for an Indian attack.”

Sisco said, "We will have to nudge Yahya toward the Awami League. We will also have to do what we can to see that he does not try Mujib. I will weigh in with Hilaly on that."

Sisco's comments referred to a report the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad had sent to Washington on 22 July, saying Pakistan was preparing for an in-camera trial of Mujib.

When Irwin wanted to know if there were any Awami Leaguers left in East Pakistan whom Yahya could deal with, Kissinger replied that Yahya claimed he could get up to sixty of the 167 Awami Leaguers.

Van Hollen said the "estimate is high."

Kissinger concluded, "I am no expert, but I think the situation could be building toward war. India is torn between wanting the refugees to go back and wanting to use them as a pretext for a move against Pakistan. Pakistan is most flexible about wanting the refugees back but is least flexible about the possibility of restoring the Awami League."

Maurice J. Williams, deputy administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), added, "I think that's too sharp a dichotomy. In the first place, I don't think Yahya can be talked out of his attitude toward Mujib. And, the refugees can't be talked into going back unless there is some political accommodation."

Sisco replied: "It is the result of Pakistan's use of force in the early days. Also of the continuation of the guerrilla action and of the general dislocation in East Pakistan. We can't tell Yahya to put his army back in their barracks when India has training camps on the border, is engaged in border crossings and is actively supporting the liberation movement."

Irwin interjected, suggesting that Washington talk with Jha and the Russians.

Kissinger wanted to be sure what the United States should discuss before making an overture to the Soviet Union.

Irwin promised "to get together a scenario on exactly what we would say to the Indians, the Pakistanis and the Russians." He said the U.S. would tell Pakistan that "we want to reduce the flow of refugees to a trickle."

To that end, added Sisco, Washington would tell Pakistan to expedite the transfer of power to the civilian government in East Pakistan.

Williams, however, remained skeptical about the outcome of such a proposal. He said, "As long as the Pakistani army is both fighting and running the country they won't be able to do much. It is absolutely necessary to get the army out of the civil administration. They don't give a damn and they aren't very good at it. That means speed up the process at least to get a quasi-Bengali political apparatus in East Pakistan."

As the Americans started formulating their strategies, Farland came to Washington on 30 July for consultation. During a meeting, also attended by Saunders, Kissinger said he was certain that the State Department wanted to link any movement on the refugee and relief fronts to a full political accommodation in East Pakistan. He asked Farland to check his judgment that it was better to talk to Yahya "with love rather than with brutality."

Farland could not agree more and stressed, "That is the only way." Washington could say anything to Yahya as long as it was related to a refugee settlement, but not to a "political accommodation."

Kissinger said there would some day be an independent Bangladesh. However, the problem now was to defuse the refugee situation so that India could not use it as a plausible excuse to start a war.

Farland, however, foresaw the possibility of an imminent war.

Kissinger, for his part, felt that America had to press the Indians harder against war. He asked what Saunders thought, who said, "We had just about run out of steam with the Indians for the moment and had to press for some accomplishment on the Pakistani side before we could go back at the Indians."

Kissinger shrugged off Saunders' last statement. He thought the big mistake the Pakistanis made was to dribble out all of the things they were doing on the refugee front. They should have saved them all up for several weeks and then announced a big program. Such a move could have been pointed out by them as a significant effort to solve the refugee problem.

He said it was "absolutely essential that we get a comprehensive refugee program. If Yahya could propose a coherent program then we would have something to take to the Indians as a basis for squeezing them not to go to war. The Indians could then be asked to let the refugees go back or to keep quiet about them. In any case, if the Pakistanis had what looked like a plausible refugee program, then the Indians would have less of an excuse to go to war."

When Farland resumed his conversation with Nixon and Kissinger the next day, he issued a dire cautionary forecast. If a war were to break out, Farland said, China would get involved and the entire subcontinent would be a "hell fight."

Nixon asked, "What do you think our position should be?"

"I think we are doing what we should," the ambassador replied to the president. He painted a dark picture for the subcontinent, pointing out that the Hindus and the Muslims – who had fought against each other for centuries – were likely to continue doing the same.

Nixon interjected, saying, "Miserable damn place."

Kissinger said the Indians' involvement in the crisis was based on their assumption that "if they can undermine East Pakistan, then in West Pakistan so many forces will be unloosed that the whole Pakistan issue will disappear."

Nixon asked Farland, "You are convinced that Yahya will fight?" The ambassador replied, "Oh, he will."

Nixon then remarked, "He will commit suicide."

Kissinger agreed that Yahya would fight, "just as Lincoln would have fought."

Farland added, "The possibility of a defeat is a minor consideration as opposed to their sense of national unity."

Nixon then inquired about the "terrible stories" being circulated by the Indians about the horrors endured by the refugees at the hands of the Pakistani army.

Farland said only what his boss wanted to hear: the Indians were "past masters at propaganda."

Nixon was concerned that a "bloodbath" would develop in East Pakistan. "We warned the Indians very strongly," he said. "If they start anything – and believe me it would be a hell of a pleasure as far as I am concerned – if [sic] we just cut off every damn bit of aid we give them, at least whatever it is worth."

Nixon said his problems in dealing with the situation in East Pakistan were magnified by the State Department bureaucracy. "We are having a hell of a time keeping the State Department bureaucracies hitched on this thing." He labeled the State Department's South Asia specialists as pro-Indian.

By August, Washington had drawn the conclusion that both India and Pakistan were marching on the road to war. On 6 August Rogers told the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, "I am increasingly concerned at public and intelligence indications that both Indian and Pakistani governments are beginning to feel war may be inevitable and are tending to act on that assumption." To buttress his contention, Rogers noted in the cable that Pakistani and Indian air forces had been put on alert.

Another sign of war preparations came from India when New Delhi told the West Bengal government that after 15 August it might not rely on the Indian army troops for internal security. Other signs included Bangladesh guerrillas' apparent plan to mount a major offensive in September and increased cross-border shelling by both the Indians and the Pakistanis, which was shifting from sabotage to direct attacks on the West Pakistani forces. On top of all this was India's rejection of the U.N. proposal to have a presence on its side of the border. India's efforts to exclude foreign relief workers from refugee areas also suggested a greater Indian sensitivity about activities in those locations.

In the light of these ominous signs, Rogers instructed the embassy to seek a meeting with either India's external affairs minister or foreign secretary, "to express our continued concern at dangers of the situation." He told the mission to specifically ask India "to take no action which would exacerbate the situation and to use its influence with the Bengali guerrilla forces to prevent the creation of a situation in which guerrilla activities could lead to hostilities."

Rogers was not the only one who felt that India and Pakistan were headed towards war. On 3 August Secretary General U Thant warned the U.N. Security Council that a major conflict could break out in South Asia.

Despite the grim assessment by his advisers, though, Nixon still saw no need to change his policy. He believed that India had planned to attack Pakistan long before the current crisis erupted. On 27 July, he had a conversation with Kissinger, who assured him that he "will make it clear with the Indians that there isn't going to be a war."

## China Containment Drives Moscow's South Asia Policy

Similar to America's strategic goal, the Soviet Union's most important purpose to have South Asia in its fold was to ensure that the subcontinent would not be used by any power against any country. From its global strategic point of view, Russia saw Pakistan as an area of enormous value to gain greater control over world affairs and to strengthen its power to fight the West and China. Soviet policies in South Asia were determined on the basis of global power politics. Its interest in South Asia was linked with its traditional czarist urge to gain access to the warm water ports for global domination.

According to Nixon's account in his book *The Real War*, Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev told Somalian President Said Barre went: "Our aim is to gain control of the two great treasure houses on which the West depends, the energy treasure of the Persian Gulf and the mineral treasure house of Central and Southern Africa."

Moscow perceived America and China as potential threats to its interests in South Asia and the Indian Ocean area. The Soviet Union considered the competition for influence in the area as a zero-sum game: to reduce Chinese and U.S. influence, its own influence must expand. For this purpose, the Soviet Union urged India to take diplomatic and economic decisions to help curb U.S. influence in South and Southwest Asia.

Russia perceived that it was vital for its strategic interests to maintain a hold over South Asia, the Persian Gulf, as well as Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey. Thus it hooked up with India as a reliable partner. India, for its part, considered Moscow as a neutralizer against China, a nation that Russia was seeking to restrain.

In 1969, Brezhnev first propounded his Asian Collective Security doctrine, calling for the renunciation of the use of force in relations between states, respect for sovereignty and the inviolability of borders, noninterference in internal affairs and the broad development of economic and other cooperation on the basis of full equality and mutual advantage. Since then the Soviet Union had been trying assiduously to woo the South Asian nations to its sphere. This move was dictated by the Soviet preoccupation with the "containment of China." Since the late 1960s the Soviet Union had perceived China as a political and military threat to its security, and a primary obstacle to the spread of its influence in Asia.

With détente flourishing in the West, the U.S.S.R. was keen to engineer a strategic cordon around China to accomplish its grand design. Pakistan, which has had friendly links with China, was crucial to such a scheme of things. The Soviet Union bent its efforts, consequently, to try to wean away Pakistan using the classic carrot-and-stick approach.

East Pakistan's brewing crisis presented an embarrassing situation for the Soviets, in that they were being driven toward an open pro-India and anti-Pakistan stance on the question. And yet, despite its close and growing friendship with India, the Soviet Union continued to resist the pressure for quite a while to publicly side with New Delhi. The Soviet Union eventually did play a crucial role in the birth of Bangladesh, especially by using its veto power at the United Nations, although Moscow initially opposed breaking Pakistan.

G.W. Chowdhury, a former Pakistani cabinet member and adviser to Yahya, noted in *Brezhnev's collective security plan for Asia*, that the Soviets avoided discussion of an independent Bengali state for a long time, talking instead of a political settlement acceptable to the whole of Pakistan. During his visit to Algeria in the summer of 1971, Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin referred to Pakistan's "territorial integrity." In fact, Moscow announced its preference for a peaceful political solution after the East Pakistan crisis had erupted.

On 3 April, President Nikolai Podgorny advised Yahya to strike a deal with the Bengalis: "We have been and remain convinced that the complex problems that have arisen in Pakistan of late can and must be solved politically without the use of force."

But the Soviet policy changed sharply in a matter of three months, as India moved closer towards a military solution. On 2 July, Kosygin pledged support for the guerrillas operating in East Bengal, and, upon receipt of a formal request from India, the Soviets promised a guarantee of military protection to enable India to resist pressure from China. Based on the latest developments in East Pakistan, Soviet policymakers had assumed a divided Pakistan was no longer politically viable and an independent East Bengal was inevitable.

Under the changed circumstances, the Soviets were willing to concede West Pakistan to China and to focus on backing India and the Bengali independence movement. The Soviets, however, continued to publicly profess their even-handed policy for the subcontinent.



Brezhnev explained the Soviet policy in a letter to Nixon on 8 December 1971. He said the Soviet Union was “profoundly concerned about the situation in the Hindostan peninsula, the more so that the dangerous events are taking place in the immediate proximity to the borders of the Soviet Union.” From the very outset, Moscow favored “a peaceful solution and did everything necessary in this respect, trying in every way to convince both sides of this.” Moscow told Yahya Khan “the only way to proceed is the way of political settlement, and that a political settlement requires political means.” It was clear all along that the refugees would not return home without a political settlement in East Pakistan, so Moscow advised “Yahya Khan to speedily take that path”.

“Our approach in this matter has not been and is not one-sided. We persistently expressed to both Pakistan and India our view about the necessity of the speediest political solution of the problem. We sought to exert influence on the Pakistani leadership not because we were interested, for some special considerations of ours, in supporting the other side. We acted in that way because we saw the events in East Pakistan as the main cause of what was happening. And our viewpoint has not changed. Unfortunately, President Yahya Khan and his government did not take our advice. We are still puzzled as to the reason why the Pakistani leadership did not want to follow the way of political settlement – the way of negotiations,” the Soviet leader told the American president.

## **Nixon’s China Plan Lands India Firmly In Soviet Orbit**

What the Soviet Union failed to win through diplomatic courtship with India for years, it got as a byproduct of America’s secret efforts to consort with China. After Kissinger informed Gandhi about Nixon’s China plan during his visit to India in an attempt to allay New Delhi’s possible misunderstanding, she rushed to sign a military pact with Moscow.

On 9 August, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Indian External Affairs Minister Swaran Singh signed the 20-year Friendship Treaty, giving India a strong weapon to face any potential military confrontation, especially if China got involved in East Pakistan.

The pact provided that in the event of an attack there would be immediate mutual consultations. By then the treaty had been discussed for nearly two years, after India dragged its feet for fear of sabotaging its own credibility in the Non-Aligned Movement.

Analysing its implications, Irwin told Nixon that each side undertook to refrain from giving assistance to any third-party taking part in armed conflict with the other party, assuring India of the prospect of Soviet help in the event of a war. The decision to depart from its traditional posture of non-alliance reflected India’s perceptions of changing international power realities, notably the détente in Sino-American relations. In addition, recent U.S. policies towards Pakistan had reinforced the Indian view that it could not count on U.S. support in the event of hostilities.

From the Soviet point of view, the rising level of tension in South Asia and the prospect that India might extend diplomatic recognition to Bangladesh, thereby precipitating hostilities, seemed to have prompted Moscow to offer the treaty. By signing the pact, the Soviets dissuaded the Indians from rushing into recognising Bangladesh. For Moscow, the gains from the treaty were formal Indian assurances that it would not enter any hostile alliance system, permit foreign bases nor allow the use of India for purposes militarily harmful to the Soviet Union.

The Soviet assurance of support had also diminished pressures on the Indian government and restored a degree of self-confidence and restraint. The treaty in itself provided no basis for the resolution of the fundamental issues at stake in East Pakistan. But by implicitly giving a deterrent against a Pakistani or Chinese attack, it encouraged the Indians to step up their covert activities in East Pakistan with less fear that these steps would escalate into war.

While the treaty represented no substantial change in Indo-Soviet relations, it reinforced the increasing closeness of views between the Indians and the Soviets. It reflected a Soviet recognition of the preeminence of its interests in India and India’s recognition of the geopolitical necessity of close ties with Moscow. The pact did not, however, imply any change in India’s desire for close relations with the United States.

The hint that New Delhi still wanted close ties with Washington came from Gandhi’s overture to America. Two days before India signed the treaty, Gandhi’s office told America she would be pleased to accept an invitation for an official visit to Washington in November. Gandhi was reluctant to visit America when it was first proposed a few months earlier.

On the day India and the Soviet Union signed the agreement, Jha sought a meeting with Kissinger in Washington. When they met, Kissinger told the Indian envoy that the treaty was a matter of secondary concern to the United States, “though it was hard to reconcile with the nonalignment policy of India.”

“What did concern us, however, was the possibility that India might draw the conclusion from it of an unlimited freedom of action vis-à-vis Pakistan,” Kissinger said. He cautioned he could not be more categorical in pointing out that a fresh Indo-Pak war would set back Indo-American relations for half a decade.

If New Delhi ended up because of this treaty as a diplomatic appendage to Moscow, America’s interest in India would diminish. America wanted a strong independent India, Kissinger said. Jha assured him that India would not be anybody’s diplomatic satellite.

Kissinger called Jha’s attention to Article 9 of the treaty and said that if read literally, this meant that India would have to support the Soviet Union diplomatically in a new crisis over Berlin. Jha said that such was not the treaty’s intention. India simply wanted an ally to counter Pakistan’s repeated claims that China would be on its side in the event of a new war.

Kissinger said that anything that exacerbated conditions in the subcontinent was against U.S. policy. He hoped the ambassador “understood that we were deadly serious about it”. He also said it seemed a pity for the United States and India, which had no conflicting interests, to quarrel over a problem whose solution was preordained by history.

Jha asked Kissinger what he meant by the last statement.

Kissinger replied: “It seemed to him that over a historical period, East Bengal would be gaining autonomy even without Indian intervention. We, in turn, had no interest in the subcontinent except to see a strong and developing India and an independent Pakistan. Indeed, there was a difference in our approach to India and in our approach to Pakistan. India was a potential world power; Pakistan would always be a regional power. For all these reasons, the problem would sort itself out if we separated the issue of relief from that of refugees and the issue of refugees from that of political accommodation.”

Jha said he had no difficulty separating relief from refugees, but he saw no way of separating refugees from political accommodation. The ambassador then handed Kissinger a letter from Gandhi to Nixon, which was couched in very conciliatory terms. Jha said it would provide an

excellent opportunity for Nixon to state his basic policy towards India and to start a useful dialogue. He also told Kissinger that Gandhi had accepted the invitation to come to Washington.

Kissinger told Jha it was essential that the India-Pakistan problem not be solved by war. "We would be generous in refugee relief, but India should not believe that it could use this crisis to overthrow the settlement of 1946," the U.S. national security adviser emphasised, referring to the Partition of British India.

On August 11, Kissinger convened a meeting of the Senior Review Group in the White House. Before he started the meeting, Nixon wanted to talk to some of the panel members, including Kissinger, Irwin, Moorer, Cushman, Williams, Sisco and Saunders.

Nixon spoke about the gathering storm over South Asia and how he wanted this issue to be handled by his administration.

"We must look at this situation above all in terms of U.S. interests. The interests of the United States would be 'very much jeopardized' by any development that could break into an open conflict. 'We will have to do anything – anything – to avoid war.' We will do 'anything – all we can – to restrain' those who want to be involved in a war."

Elaborating, the president said, "India's interest, some Indians think, would be served by war. Some Pakistanis would be willing to have a war. 'The USSR – I don't know what they want.' The interests of the United States would not be served by a war. The new China relationship would be imperiled, probably beyond repair, and we would have a 'very sticky problem' with the USSR."

Nixon then vented his frustration with U.S. diplomats and gave his take on India's plans, noting that he had been visiting India since 1953, when he was vice president under President Dwight Eisenhower. "Now let me be very blunt," he said. "Every ambassador who goes to India falls in love with India."

"Some have the same experience in Pakistan – though not as many because the Pakistanis were a different breed. The Pakistanis are straight forward – and sometimes extremely stupid. The Indians are more devious, sometimes so smart that we fall for their line."

He stressed that the United States "must not – cannot – allow" India to use the refugees as a pretext for breaking up Pakistan. He was "convinced" that India wanted to break up Pakistan. That was what he might want to do if he were in New Delhi, Nixon added. He feared that if the Indians did "romp around in East Pakistan" or sent guerrillas, the Pakistanis might well go to war even though they felt that such a move could be suicidal.

Nixon said the United States would "go all out to help the refugees and to help people in East Pakistan" and stop "a war because war would help no one. We will not publicly exacerbate the political situation. We will deal with the political problem in private. It is not our job to determine the political future of Pakistan. The Pakistanis have to work out their own future. We will not measure our relationship with the government in terms of what it has done in East Pakistan. By that criterion, we would cut off relations with every communist government in the world because of the slaughter that has taken place in the communist countries."

When Nixon asked if anyone had questions, Sisco ventured the Indo-U.S. treaty would have serious repercussions. "The Indians may feel constrained from conventional military moves across the border, but they may feel encouraged to support guerrilla crossings. Relief alone won't do the job. President Yahya may not be able to go far enough. But if there is not some progress on the question of political accommodation, the guerrilla warfare would continue, Pakistani military reprisals would continue and the refugees would be unlikely to return to their homes. More importantly, Yahya may feel he has to attack the guerrilla camps in India."

On 14 August, just five days after India and Russia signed the friendship treaty, Kissinger met with Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador in Washington, amidst charges that the pact encouraged India to take military action to resolve the crisis. They talked over lunch in the Map Room of the White House. Kissinger summarized the conversation in a 24-August memorandum to Nixon.

Dobrynin told Kissinger that the Soviet Union was doing its best to restrain India as it wanted peace in the subcontinent. He remarked it was irony that the Russians were lined up with what looked like the pillar of democracy while the United States was lined up with the communist Chinese.

Kissinger took exception to the Soviet ambassador's observation. As far as the subcontinent was concerned, he said, the United States was not lined up with anybody. "We, above all, wanted to prevent the outbreak of a war, and we hoped that they did not inadvertently give the Indians enough backing so that they felt it was safe to engage in war."

Dobrynin said Moscow's interest was stability and, in fact, the Soviet Union had invited Pakistan's foreign secretary to come to Russia to see the country's pursuit of a balanced policy.

Kissinger felt what Moscow had done thus far was inadequate. He said Moscow should not encourage Indian pressures for an immediate political solution in East Pakistan, as that would only make the problem impossible to resolve. He suggested it would be best if the refugee and relief problems were first addressed and the political accommodation, later.

Dobrynin said the Soviet Union basically agreed with such a formula. He asked Kissinger whether it was correct that the United States would look at a Chinese attack on India as a matter of extreme gravity and might even give them some support. India had advised the Soviet Union that Washington would come to New Delhi's aid in the event of an attack by China. He said India had been puzzled by Kissinger's comment to this effect, but had then put it all together after the U.S. national security adviser's trip to Beijing.

Kissinger said he never commented about his meetings in other countries, but that the U.S. certainly was not aligned with any country against India.

On 26 August, Hoskinson sent a memo to Kissinger, summarising the Soviet ambassador's answers to some questions Rogers had posed regarding the Soviet position on South Asia. Analysing the reports, Hoskinson concluded that if Kosygin did come through on the guarantees against China, India would feel much more inclined to attack East Pakistan.

Dobrynin said Moscow had no interest in a conflict in the area. The Soviet policy had been directed towards reducing the danger of a conflict. The Indo-Soviet treaty was to calm the Indians by assuring them that they had friends when they suspected the Pakistanis of planning hostilities. The treaty seemed, in fact, to have had the intended effect.

Dobrynin said the guerrilla action in East Pakistan was "practically over" and the real problem was coping with seven million refugees. He volunteered that the Soviets were not encouraging the separatist movement in East Pakistan. The Soviets had informed the Indians that they would not support demands for a separatist state.

As for the Soviet involvement with the Bengali guerrillas, Dobrynin said, "We do not like to be involved in such things." Dobrynin's assurance later proved to be something other than what Moscow actually had in mind.

While Moscow and Washington discussed global politics, New Delhi became concerned about America's stance on South Asia. On 7 September, Saunders asked Kissinger how to respond to a query from India's External Affairs minister about how the United States would react if China attacked India. Singh was told by Kissinger in New Delhi that India "could be reassured concerning continued U.S. support against China."

But upon his return from New Delhi, Kissinger told Jha "that if China intervened as the result of an Indo-Pakistan confrontation, the U.S. reaction could not be assured." Singh was surprised at the apparent change and told Keating, "We would definitely like to know where it now stands."

Saunders opposed a formal reply to Singh. He suggested instructing Keating to reply that there was no ground for confusion. America had often expressed its interest in India's independence and its consequent concern over an unprovoked Chinese attack. But if India started a war, obviously the situation would be different.

On 29 September 1971, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko met with Nixon in the Oval Office. He assured that the Soviet Union did not want this crisis to develop into a full-blown war, which could have serious consequences on the Nixon-Brezhnev summit scheduled for the following year. He told the American president that Gandhi had assured the Soviet government she would do nothing to precipitate a clash with Pakistan.

Gromyko's assurance, however, proved to be an attempt by Moscow to let India achieve its goal without provoking Nixon, which could have adversely affected the planned superpower summit the following year. Just a few months before the India-Pakistan war broke out, the Soviet Union decided to side with New Delhi, especially after the signing of the Indo-Soviet pact. As a result, when America raised the South Asian issue with Gromyko to urge Moscow to restrain India, the Soviet foreign minister retorted that the country that should be restrained first of all was Pakistan, at least according to the conclusion which the Soviet government had come to on the basis of its observations.

Nixon, however, took Gromyko's assurance at its face value, and simply observed that Moscow and Washington would need to keep in close touch with each other on the South Asian situation.

Nixon had reason to accept Russia's statement as genuine. The U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, Jacob Beam, told the State Department that the Russians had kept doors open for cordial ties with Pakistan even after signing the peace treaty with New Delhi. His source of information was Pakistan's ambassador to the Soviet Union. Beam met with Pakistan's envoy Jamsheed Marker before Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Sultan Khan's scheduled visit to Moscow.

Marker told the U.S. ambassador that he did not believe the Soviets had deliberately killed the "spirit of Tashkent. But the support of India offered greater rewards in enhancing the expansion of Soviet influence and circumscribing the Chinese," Beam reported in a telegram in September 1971. "Actually, the day-to-day Soviet-Pakistani relations continued normal and the Soviets were still interested in aiding development projects."

Another sign of Moscow's willingness to keep Pakistan in good humor came from the fact that the Russians had made all arrangements for its foreign secretary's visit, including his stay at Sovietskaya Hotel as an official visitor. "The Soviets have been most cooperative in making arrangements, including appointments with Gromyko," Marker told the U.S. ambassador.

In early November, Nixon requested Kosygin to urge India to agree to talks with Pakistan for mutual withdrawal of forces. Kosygin's reply to Nixon's letter was delivered to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow on 3 December. It was transmitted to the State Department from Moscow the same day. Kosygin said the withdrawal was "scarcely feasible." He stressed the importance of a political solution and put the onus for such a solution on Pakistan.

As the full-scale war broke out in South Asia, Nixon sent yet another letter to Brezhnev on 6 December, expressing his "profound concern about the deepening gravity of the situation in the Indian subcontinent."

"Whatever one's view of the causes of the present conflict, the objective fact now is that Indian military forces are being used in an effort to impose political demands and to dismember the sovereign state of Pakistan. It is also a fact that your government has aligned itself with this Indian policy," the U.S. president complained to the Soviet leader.

He warned Brezhnev that Soviet support for India ran "counter to the recent encouraging trend in international relations to which the mutual endeavors of our two governments have been making such a major contribution," a reference to the US-Soviet understanding on the Middle East.

Nixon urged Brezhnev to restrain New Delhi from dismembering Pakistan. "I must state frankly that it would be illusory to think that if India can somehow achieve its objectives by military action the issue will be closed. An 'accomplished fact' brought about in this way would long complicate the international situation and undermine the confidence that we and you have worked so hard to establish. It could not help but have an adverse effect on a whole range of other issues."

Brezhnev replied: "The Soviet leaders, already for a prolonged time and not once, have drawn the attention of the president to a dangerous situation developing in the Hindostan peninsula as a result of the actions of the Pakistani government against the population of East Pakistan. While applying efforts to prevent an armed conflict between Pakistan and India, we at the same time were firmly convinced – and so frankly stated to the president – that of crucial importance in this matter would be a political settlement in East Pakistan on the basis of respect for the will of its population as clearly expressed in the December 1970 elections. Although the American side did not object in principle to the approach above, we, it must be said frankly, did not receive the impression that the United States acted actively enough and precisely in the same direction that we were acting, i.e. towards removing the main source of tension in relations between Pakistan and India."

"In view of all the circumstances," the Soviet leader continued, "which led to the present conflict, to demand a ceasefire without demanding, as an organic connection with that question, that the people of East Pakistan in the name of its elected representatives be given an opportunity to decide its destiny for themselves – would be both unrealistic and unjust with respect to that people, and would not eliminate the causes which led to the conflict."

Kissinger called Nixon shortly after receiving the Soviet message. He said the message proposed a Security Council resolution, calling for a ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, but made no provision for the withdrawal of troops. Kissinger viewed the references in the message to East Pakistan rather than Bangladesh as a positive sign. He characterized the proposed resolution as unacceptable but "at least a move."

Nixon said, "Just tell them, sorry, no withdrawal, no deal."

On 8 December, Brezhnev wrote to Nixon again, offering what Kissinger described were conciliatory proposals to resolve the crisis, but he still found them unacceptable. Blaming Yahya for his failure to end the conflict politically, the Soviet leader said, "The thing to do now is to stop the war already underway. This requires a ceasefire. But the question arises – what is the best way to achieve it? It seems to us that, proceeding from the situation which developed from the very start, effective can be such a ceasefire, which would be connected with a simultaneous decision for a political settlement, based on the recognition of the will of the East Pakistani population."

He proposed to solve "together and simultaneously both questions – of ceasefire and of immediate resumption of negotiations between" Pakistan and the Bengalis. "Those negotiations should, naturally, be started from the stage at which they were discontinued. We feel that this proposal provides a way out for all, including Pakistan. On the other hand, all would lose – and Pakistan maybe even more than others – on the way of continuing the war and rejecting a political settlement."

Kissinger briefed Nixon on Brezhnev's letter less than two hours after he had received it: "They're proposing a ceasefire and a political negotiation between Islamabad and the Awami League." These he characterized as "old proposals" and added, "It is a very conciliatory letter, which is in itself unacceptable."

He proposed a response, thus: "If this negotiation is within the framework of the united Pakistan, with maximum autonomy for the east, we are willing to discuss it with them. That will separate them to some extent from the Indians. And, secondly, it will get us a ceasefire in the west, which we've got to have if the West Pakistanis aren't to be smashed."

## **Moscow Pushes India To Capture Dhaka Fast**

On 12 December, Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister V.V. Kuznetsov arrived in Delhi heading a five-man team. Meanwhile, former Indian ambassador to Moscow, D.P. Dhar, who negotiated the Indo-Soviet treaty, flew to Russia. Both moves occurred under the consultation provision of the friendship treaty.

Kissinger told Nixon that the Soviet delegation pressed for a decisive Indian action to quickly end the war in East Pakistan. Quoting an unnamed source, Kissinger said the Soviets were disappointed by the pace of the Indian offensive in the East, but the other two suggested that in general Moscow was satisfied. Kuznetsov advised the Indians to "liberate Bangladesh in the shortest possible time." He encouraged the Indians to confine their objectives to East Pakistan and not to try to take any part of West Pakistan, including Azad Kashmir, as the Indians had earlier decided. Moscow was concerned that a great power confrontation over South Asia could ensue and that the longer the war lasted, the greater was the risk.

Quoting a high-level Indian government official, who was a CIA agent and whose identity still remains classified as of this writing, the CIA said Kuznetsov arrived in India to discuss the Bangladesh recognition by the Soviet Union. India had asked Moscow to recognize Bangladesh and sign a defense treaty with Dhaka. But Kuznetsov said Russia would not recognize the new country until India liberated Dhaka, according to a CIA dispatch to Washington from New Delhi on 15 December. If the Soviet Union was to retain whatever small influence it still had in Pakistan, it could not recognize Bangladesh until these conditions were met, the Soviet minister reasoned.

The Soviet Union, according to a secret CIA agent, was impatient with the Indian armed forces for their inability to liberate Bangladesh within the ten-day time frame mentioned before the outbreak of hostilities. Kuznetsov told the Indians the Soviet position in the Security Council of opposing a ceasefire became more untenable the longer the war went on in the East. Kuznetsov said the Soviet Union would continue to use its veto power to stall any efforts to bring about a ceasefire. He, however, stressed the importance of a quick and decisive Indian action in liberating Bangladesh in the shortest possible time.

Kuznetsov delayed his scheduled return to Moscow because he was awaiting special instructions from Brezhnev about India's request to the Soviet Union to sign a defense agreement with Bangladesh. Brezhnev was not in Moscow when Kuznetsov sent him the request for guidance.

Kuznetsov also discussed the threat of Chinese intervention. Both the Indian officials and Kuznetsov agreed the Chinese could attack through Sikkim. China would seek to overwhelm the Indian defensive position in the Siliguri area and then withdraw back across the border, as it did in 1962, to embarrass India.

The Soviet ambassador to India, Nikolai M Pegov, said he saw no need for India to attack West Pakistan because Pakistan's military machine had already been crushed. However, if India ignored the Soviet advice and took Pakistan-held Kashmir, it should be done in the shortest possible time. Moscow "would not interfere." Pegov discounted possible U.S. or Chinese intervention. He asserted that the Soviet fleet, already docked in the Indian Ocean, would prevent the U.S. Seventh Fleet from intervening. If the Chinese moved into Ladakh, "the Soviets would open a diversionary action in Sinkiang."

As the major powers debated their plans behind the scenes, America's deployment of the naval task force in the Bay of Bengal put Keating on a tough spot. In a cable to the State Department on 15 December, the ambassador vented his anger: "Up until last few days, I have felt able to defend the U.S. policy on the basis of our overriding concern to bring a halt to hostilities. I am now troubled by the fact that a number of my diplomatic colleagues view the deployment of the carrier task force as a military escalation by the United States."

Especially, Canadian High Commissioner James George felt that the move encouraged Yahya to continue his military effort. He said Yahya's disavowal of the initial ceasefire message, sent by Major General Rao Farman Ali from Dhaka, and the subsequent message from East Pakistan Governor A.M. Malik was directly related to the carrier task force deployment.

The high commissioner viewed the task force deployment as a direct superpower involvement. It was bound to make both the Soviets and the Chinese nervous and likely to serve as a screen for their increased participation in the conflict. George told Keating he would send a strong message along these lines to his prime minister, recommending that Pierre Trudeau, in turn, contact Nixon.

After the war ended, Gandhi denied, the Soviet Union ever promised her that it would intervene against the Seventh Fleet or China. "There is fantastic nonsense being talked about in the United States about our having received promises from the Soviet Union," she told newsmen on 22 December. "I assure you that these matters were not talked over with the Soviets."

As to the economic consequences of the war, a penalty Nixon had promised to impose on India if it started a war, Gandhi said, "We'll have some hardship but we are used to it and can bear it."

Nixon's policy to apply economic pressure on Gandhi resembled the tactics followed with success by previous U.S. administrations, especially

under President Lyndon B. Johnson when America forced Auyb not to invite China to be involved in the 1965 war. But the Nixon administration miscalculated India's resolve and failed to understand what was at stake this time around – an opportunity to eliminate a security threat forever.

## U.S. Policy Irritates Britain

On 30 September 1971, looking towards his upcoming conversation with Gandhi in November of that year, Nixon suggested that the United States and Britain exchange information on their talks with her. It was important to do so, he said, so that “she doesn't come in here and, frankly, pull our legs.” Nixon told British Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home that the Indians were preventing a settlement of the crisis. His comments were in response to a suggestion by the Briton to reach out to the Bengalis for a political solution.

By the time Gandhi embarked upon her trip to Washington, Britain saw the possibility of war in South Asia becoming more real. On 4 November, the day Gandhi met with Nixon in Washington, the British cabinet assessed Gandhi's remarks in London the previous week, which painted “pessimistic and almost fatalistic views about the East Pakistan situation.”

Gandhi, according to a top-secret assessment by the British cabinet, thought the only chance for a political settlement lay in discussions between Yahya and Mujib. Even if such discussions could be arranged, the outcome was highly doubtful, because Mujib no longer commanded the loyalty of Bangladesh activists. Gandhi told the British foreign secretary that India supported the guerillas because it believed they would turn to China if New Delhi ignored them.

The British prime minister also “gained the same pessimistic impression from his own discussions with” Gandhi, who appeared convinced that tensions would inevitably grow worse. She told the Britons that the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship resulted from India's growing fear of China. The news of Nixon's intended visit to Beijing sharpened India's fear. Heath told the cabinet “there were grave dangers in the present situation; forces were operating in both India and Pakistan, which could lead to war.”

Britain's policy regarding the conflict sharply contrasted with that of the United States, causing irritation in London. On 12 December, the U.S. ambassador Walter H. Annenberg had an extensive discussion with the British prime minister and the foreign secretary at 10 Downing Street (the British prime minister's office) on the India-Pakistan situation. He told the prime minister that the United States was calling for an immediate meeting of the Security Council to halt further fighting in East Pakistan and to prevent the spread of fighting in the West. America intended to introduce a resolution to this end and sought British support for it.

The Britons had by then been discussing the situation for some time. Heath said that ever since the Indo-Pak situation worsened, the British government had endeavored to restrain both countries. Such a course, the premier said, held out more hope than taking positions. For this reason, the United Kingdom had not thought it right to vote for the U.N. resolutions to retain the possibility of acting directly vis-a-vis both governments now, or in the future.

Both Heath and Douglas-Home thought there was little possibility of stopping the Indian army short of Dhaka. The immediate problem was to try to bring about a ceasefire and prevent the massacre of the remainder of the Pakistan army in the East, as well as millions of Biharis, the Urdu-speaking Muslim immigrants from India who collaborated with the West Pakistanis against the Bengalis. The British leaders said any resolution calling for withdrawal of Indian troops from East Pakistan would be unrealistic and, in any event, would be vetoed by the Soviet Union. It might be possible to devise a resolution acceptable in the Security Council. They outlined a ceasefire proposal in the West that would require India and Pakistan to instruct their military commanders in the East to arrange a ceasefire.

Britain was surprised by America's push at the United Nations for a resolution calling for a political settlement and the withdrawal of Indian troops from East Pakistan even after India had almost reached Dhaka. The U.S. mission in Britain described London's reaction in a telegram to the State Department on 15 December. A day earlier, Sir Stanley Tomlinson, deputy undersecretary at the British Foreign Office, had summoned the American ambassador to discuss U.S. and UK policies on India and Pakistan. Making clear that he was expressing British government views, Tomlinson said British ministers and officials were disappointed and concerned that in recent times, American and British policies were marked by sharp differences on some important problems.

He said the India-Pakistan situation had raised questions within the British government as to whether the two governments acted based on different intelligence information and political assessments. Further, Britain felt that it really did not know the basis for the U.S. thinking and the objectives it was pursuing. He said that some specific aspects of the American policy – and such as attempts to arrange talks between the Bengalis and Yahya – were puzzling or disturbing to Britain.

Tomlinson said he did not know the extent of U.S. contacts or information vis-a-vis Bangladesh representatives. Based on the information available to them, British officials were convinced that the Bangladesh leaders would not settle for anything less than complete independence. He said Britain was not itself advocating Bangladesh independence. A confederal arrangement or any other solution worked out between West and East Pakistan would be acceptable to London. But a stark reality led Britain to conclude that independence was inevitable. If America assessed the situation differently, Britain would very much like to know.

Tomlinson noted that British officials had been puzzled by statements by a high U.S. official that America believed that negotiations – which Washington had been trying to facilitate between Pakistan and the Bangladesh representatives – could have led to positive political results. Britain wondered whether America had information other than what had been available to London at that time, because the the British officials viewed that even if such talks could have been arranged, they provided little hope for progress, if at all.

Tomlinson said Britain wanted to learn the background of American thinking on this proposal. Britain's main objective now was to prevent massacres of the Pakistani forces and the Biharis in East Pakistan. Britain believed that the only organized force that could prevent such horrors was the Indian army. Britain had been assured by New Delhi that the Indian forces would strive to minimize the loss of life and ensure humane treatment. Britain believed it would be a serious mistake to insist that the Indian forces withdraw immediately, even if that were a realistic possibility. Tomlinson reiterated what the prime minister and the foreign secretary had said previously, i.e., British assessment was that India had no territorial aims. Despite some equivocation on Azad Kashmir, he said that statements made by Gandhi and Swaran Singh could be taken at face value. As the two talked, information reached London that America would accept language along the lines proposed by Britain for a Security Council resolution.

On the diplomatic front, except for China and the United States, no major power openly supported Pakistan's efforts in East Bengal. Moscow

firmly opposed the military crackdown; its choice was undoubtedly heavily influenced by India. It wanted a political settlement and probably doubted that a prolonged conflict would serve Soviet interests. Moscow, which welcomed partition of British India because it created more opportunities for communist infiltration in South Asia, had concluded the odds favored a separatist solution; Islamabad had little chance of imposing its will on East Bengal in any lasting and effective way.

China's policy was mainly guided by its adversarial relations with India. Beijing accused India of interfering in Pakistan's affairs, but its unspoken concern was New Delhi's geopolitical strategy, which China considered hegemonistic. A Chinese military intervention in support of West Pakistan was unlikely, because Beijing abhorred risking a major war to bail out a beleaguered friend. China was cowed by the Soviet threat. It, however, would have faced a dilemma if a communist group took control of East Bengal and sought Beijing's help, a scenario that, fortunately, the Chinese leadership never had to confront.

China, however, created trouble for Bangladesh through proxies, Swaran Singh told Kissinger in 1974. "You are aware that the Naxalites" headquarters are not very far from Bangladesh. There is contact between them and extremist elements in Bangladesh. I am sorry to say that there have been some political killings in Bangladesh, which are traceable to them," India's foreign minister said.

As for India, Singh said, New Delhi's relations with Dhaka were just right. "We have a correct relationship with Bangladesh. India had 300,000 soldiers in Bangladesh when the ceasefire took place. By 15 March 1972, all Indian soldiers had been withdrawn. Bangladesh was pleading with us to leave them there. We said that we did not want an Indian army involved in maintaining law and order in Bangladesh. We told them that we didn't want influence there. Even in these recent talks in New Delhi, we played a friendly, sober, cooperative, mature role. The talks went best when the three foreign ministers were alone. We did not try to influence the Bangladesh foreign minister at all."

## America Wakes Up, Smells War

Faced with a fast deteriorating situation in East Pakistan and the possibility of a protracted crisis, Washington began rethinking its strategy towards the end of July. On 30 July, the Senior Review Group decided to reverse its previous do-nothing policy, and recommend a do-something strategy. The Americans felt they needed to get things moving to avoid an unfavourable outcome. Among those present at the panel meeting were Kissinger, Williams, Helms, and Irwin.

“Our basic feeling is that we should do something, and we recommend some movement along the lines of the scenario we have prepared. We think we should try further with the Pakistanis to seek some restraint on the military activity and persuade them to take steps to reduce the flow of refugees and move toward some form of political accommodation in East Pakistan. We should also try to counsel restraint on India in connection with some of the things they are doing,” Irwin said.

CIA chief Helms said India was doing something in the military field to keep everyone stirred up. “We don’t think they are preparing for a physical attack, but the indicators keep flashing. This is all designed to keep the pot boiling.”

Irwin suggested that the United States speak to the British and the Soviets. “We can talk with the British about a joint or separate but concurrent approaches to the two states, and to the Soviets about getting an assessment of the situation.”

Helms asked whether anyone had thought of involving the Shah of Iran to work with Pakistan. “He might be able to help us; at least, it’s worth considering since we seem to be out of gas with Pakistan.”

Kissinger took exception to Helms’ last statement and said, “We’re not out of gas with Yahya. I think he will do a lot of things that are reasonable if we concentrate on the refugee problem. One thing he will not do is talk to the Awami League, at least not as an institution. He might talk to some Awami League leaders as individuals.”

But Irwin, the under secretary of state, reminded that Farland had indicated Yahya might talk to the Awami League.

Kissinger at this point wanted to know what the Indians were after. He asked, “Do they want a political accommodation or do they want to split off East Pakistan?”

Irwin replied, “It’s impossible to know. They would probably prefer to split off East Pakistan.”

Kissinger asked if it was possible to ask the Pakistan army to withdraw to its barracks when India was supporting guerrilla activity in the country.

Irwin said: “I don’t think so, but we might work toward this. If conditions improve, this might be our goal.”

Williams, the USAID deputy director, interjected that he wouldn’t want to take the army out of its role of maintaining security. “You can take them out of the civil administration, though – out of the Government House – without insisting that they return to their barracks.”

Turning to the military activity from India, Kissinger said the cross-border operations depended on India. “You could put the greatest civilian government in the world in East Pakistan and if the Indians want to continue the cross-border operations, they will.”

Irwin agreed, but wondered how to stop the cross-border operations. “If we can do it by direct pressure on India, fine. If that is not possible, one way to help would be to start some form of political accommodation in East Pakistan.”

Indeed, without political accommodation, India and Pakistan were headed for war, cautioned a 12 July National Security Council staff report on the prospects of an armed conflict in South Asia. The danger of a new war “remains real,” if no progress was made towards finding a political solution. Moreover, if the refugee repatriation did not start by September or October of that year, chances for hostilities “will increase.”

The study outlined how things might shape up going forward. Indian military forces might attack East Pakistan to seize and hold part of the area, at a minimum, and to drive out the West Pakistani forces, at the most. Alternatively, India could step up more direct support for a major insurgent effort to seize and hold a portion of East Pakistan. Pakistan could also initiate a war by attacking guerrilla camps in India. It could also stir up trouble in Kashmir, leading to a full-scale war.

The report concluded that U.S. interests would be best served by an early end to the conflict and by negotiations among all parties, leading to a withdrawal of Indian troops and an overall political settlement.

The Washington Special Action Group later that day discussed the report and agreed that “a possible India-Pakistan conflict seemed likely.” So it decided to develop a scenario for U.S. approaches to both the Soviet Union and China before and after the outbreak of hostilities, while stressing the need to tell China that Washington wanted to keep Pakistan unified.

Kissinger outlined the overall U.S. objectives for the panel. “We have an overall interest in preventing hostilities. We do not want to be forced to choose between 800 million Chinese and 600 million Indians and Bengalis. We don’t want India in the Soviet camp, even though the Indians may be driving themselves there deliberately through the creation of a phony crisis.”

He then asked two questions: what the United States could do to minimize the danger of an outbreak of war, and what it could do if war broke out. “We need to consider what we would say to the Soviets and to the Chinese and how we could cooperate with the Soviets to prevent a war,” Kissinger said.

### India Activates Airfields For War

When Kissinger asked whether the panel thought India would attack Pakistan, both Helms and Sisco ruled out such a possibility.

“My reaction is that in no circumstances will the Pakistanis initiate hostilities in the West. If the Indian objective is to achieve a Bangladesh that they can work with, they will continue to support the liberation movement,” Sisco added.

Moorer, Joint Chiefs chairman, revealed that India had already started activating some airfields near West Pakistan.

Helms reported that China was not reinforcing its troops and that it would be difficult for Beijing to do so, because the terrain was bad and China lacked the necessary equipment. He also noted that China did reinforce its troops in 1962 when it fought India, and the United States knew about it ahead of time. This time around, Washington would also know about China's reinforcement in advance.

Irwin predicted three things that could prompt India to move militarily against Pakistan: some military incident; a famine in East Pakistan, resulting in a wave of new refugees crossing in to India; or Mujib's execution.

Despite America's grim assessment, Yahya remained defiant. On 18 August Kissinger told Nixon that the Pakistani president was "committed to preventing the Bengali independence," but things had shifted in East Pakistan as well as in India.

"In East Pakistan, a serious insurgency movement is now under way in the countryside and is beginning to penetrate the major cities. This has been fed by the Indians in terms of logistics, training and some arms, but basically reflects a strong Bengali will to resist the West Pakistanis. This, in turn, provokes an army response, which stimulates further the refugee flow."

India's position had changed since the military crackdown in March of the same year. "The Indians before March preferred a united Pakistan when they thought the Bengalis might play a dominant role, but now that they judge this is no longer possible they would like to see an independent Bangladesh as soon as possible. The problem with their policy is that they may be able through their support for the guerrillas to do enough to stalemate a political settlement in East Pakistan but not enough to produce independence."

Kissinger advised Nixon that the only strategy for the U.S. to follow in this situation was to concentrate the world's attention on averting a famine as an umbrella under which enough might be done to deprive India of an excuse for intervention. Such a measure would give Yahya a face-saving way of taking some of the political steps that might be necessary, if he had to rely on political initiatives to restore normalcy, rather than on military control.

Kissinger told Nixon that a U.S. effort to break Pakistan in the name of self-determination would also have implications for Taiwan and Tibet in Beijing's eyes, implying these territories could press on with their right to self-determination. It was important, Kissinger said, that China not feel that Washington was lining up with India and the Soviet Union against Beijing. He added that for the moment, it was important that America "stay one step behind the Soviets in India, although over the longer run, we have no interest in writing off 600 million Indians and Bengalis."

On 19 August, Kissinger wrote to Nixon to comment on Gandhi's recent letter to the president. In that letter, Gandhi had rejected the idea of having U.N. observers stationed on both sides of the India-East Pakistan border. She also complained about continued U.S. arms supplies to Pakistan. Kissinger, in his review, noted with interest the prime minister's moderate tone in the letter and the timing of its dispatch to Washington. He said the fact that she dispatched it two days before India signed the friendship pact with the Soviet Union – the day she also accepted an invitation to visit Washington – was an indication that New Delhi still wanted a balanced relationship, despite its then newly formed special relationship with Moscow. Gandhi, by no means, was "prepared to write off" the United States.

Kissinger again sent a note to Nixon on 24 August along with a memo he had received from the State Department and a CIA analysis of the Indo-Soviet treaty. The national security adviser compared the treaty with the one the Soviet Union earlier had signed with Egypt and found that the Indian pact was weaker on the military aspect. The Indo-Soviet agreement provided for "consultations" in the event of an attack by a third country, but the Egyptian deal called for the two sides to "concert" their positions.

"This does not add up to the language of a traditional mutual defense or security pact, since there is no specific obligation to assist militarily in case of a conflict with a third party," Kissinger explained. "Nevertheless, the impression is left that the Soviets would, if necessary, join in on India's side in a conflict involving Pakistan or China."

By concluding the treaty, the Indians probably felt that they had bought both time and insurance as they confronted the problem of war with Pakistan. Pressure had been mounting rapidly on Gandhi to "do something" positive about the East Pakistan and the refugee situation. The treaty, which had met with almost universal acclaim in India, had relieved this pressure to some extent. Moreover, the Indians seemed to feel that the treaty put both the Pakistanis and the Chinese on notice that India did not stand alone. If Indo-Pak hostilities did break out, the Indians were probably hoping that the treaty would at least serve to limit the Chinese intervention and perhaps even bring the Soviets indirectly on their side. Finally, the Indians might hope that the treaty would instill in the West Pakistanis a greater sense of urgency to halt the refugee flow and reach a political accommodation in East Pakistan.

Kissinger further explained that such consolidation of Indo-Soviet relationship, at the expense of India's cherished non-alignment position, indicated that the Indians thought their vital interests were at stake in the present situation. On the other hand, the treaty should have given the Pakistanis a pause for reflection if they had, for instance, been thinking of punitive raids against the guerrillas in India. Previously, they might have hoped that China would fully support Pakistan in a war against India, but they must have lost much of that confidence that Beijing would attack India now that it would mean risking hostilities with the Soviets on their behalf.

China would not miss the point that its growing role in South Asia had been, at least for the moment, countered by the Soviets. At stake would not only be the Chinese and Soviet positions in South Asia, but in all of Asia. Neither the Soviets nor the Chinese were easily bluffed and they could rapidly move towards a confrontation, should India and Pakistan go to war, Kissinger warned.

On 25 August, when Kissinger met with the Indian ambassador to Washington, he sounded out a harsher tone over India's new pact with Moscow. He told Jha that if India wanted to become an extension of the Soviet foreign policy, then inevitably the American interest in India was bound to decline and India would have to look to Moscow for the greater part of its economic aid. He could not understand why India would want to be drawn into the Sino-Soviet rivalry or why it would deliberately antagonize the one country (namely, the U.S.) that had no national interests in the subcontinent except an independent and healthy India and an independent subcontinent.

Jha, who was governor of the Reserve Bank of India until May 1970, sought to allay Kissinger's concerns, saying Gandhi was not at all pro-Soviet. Dinesh Singh, who was India's foreign minister from February 1969 until June 1970, thought about the pact first. In fact, Jha said privately, he would not be a bit surprised if Dinesh Singh actually received a payment from the communists for pushing the treaty. At the same time, Jha said Kaul and Haksar were very much under Soviet influence. In short, Gandhi was under great pressure for both these reasons. The project had been going along for about a year, and recently Gandhi felt she needed some dramatic foreign policy, so she picked it up. He gave the assurance that Kissinger could be certain that she did not have her heart in it.



After calming Kissinger's nerves, Jha turned to the matter of Gandhi's upcoming visit to Washington. He asked if a military plane could pick up the Indian premier from New York to Washington, and Kissinger said yes. Could Nixon come to some social function at the Indian Embassy or at the Blair House marking Gandhi's visit?

Kissinger said the dinner was absolutely out of the question. Whether the president might call on Gandhi at the Blair House would depend on the state of relations at that time. Kissinger cautioned it was imperative for India not to do anything that could upset the equilibrium before Gandhi's visit. He suggested the Indian press campaign be muted in anticipation of that trip.

By October 1971, American policymakers had started grappling with possible courses of action in case a war indeed engulfed the subcontinent. For Washington, the major issues were the following:

1. How must America act if Pakistan initiated an attack on India?
2. What would America's role be if India started a war?
3. How should the United States respond to a Chinese involvement?
4. How should America react if the Soviets came to New Delhi's aid?

They pondered each scenario and came up with plans of action.

If Pakistan attacked its rival, the main question would be whether the United States should cut off aid to India. In which case, Washington could use the possible cut-off to press India for negotiation, while using its pressure on Pakistan to stop the fighting.

"If India had attacked Pakistan, we would want to make clear that we would not come to India's aid in the event of the Chinese provoked border incidents," the State Department decided.

If it remained unclear who started the war, it added, "We should consider consulting with India and responding positively to Indian requests for assistance, if the invasion threatened critical supply lines or occupation of major portions of India."

If Pakistan attacked India, America "should consult, if asked, under the Air Defence Agreement and be prepared to assist with equipment." The Air Defence Agreement was signed in 1963, stipulating American help if Pakistan faced a military threat.

Finally, the State Department opined, if China attacked India, Nixon's planned trip to Beijing should be postponed.

While the State Department developed America's possible responses, in the afternoon of 7 October Kissinger held a meeting of the Washington Special Action Group, which decided to ask the Soviet Union to appeal to India for restraint. The Shah would be requested to make a similar appeal to Yahya.

During the meeting, Helms told the group that both India and Pakistan continued their military preparations, although their moves still seemed primarily defensive. In the west, each army had about 200,000 soldiers near the border and they were in a high state of readiness. In Pakistan, the military had moved to forward positions. India had two infantry divisions and an armored division earmarked for the western front, although all three were still stationed hundreds of miles from the frontier. The armored division had been alerted for the movement, but it still appeared to be in central India. If India were about to attack, these units almost certainly would move to the front, but it would take them about a week to take their positions.

The Pakistanis also had two infantry divisions and an armored division in rear areas. They might hold the armored division in place, about 100 miles from the border, but would bring up the other two if they expected war in a matter of days. In the east, the Indians had over 100,000 troops, against Pakistan's 70,000 in East Pakistan. The Indians might want to bring in one more division before launching an attack.

The Pakistanis had their hands full with the guerrillas and were in no shape to start major operations. War seemed most likely to come, as it did in 1965, from several miscalculations, but out of a deliberate decision by one side or the other. Gandhi could still decide to invade East Pakistan to end the refugee influx.

Senior Pakistani officials, according to Helms, were convinced that Yahya would launch a preemptive attack in the following few weeks. Yahya himself had given the British an impression that he was considering such an action, but he had assured the U.S. deputy chief of mission otherwise. The CIA director speculated that Yahya might be trying to bring Western pressure on India or he might think an attack would help by bringing international pressure on both sides.

In East Pakistan, the guerrillas had by then become more active as the rains tapered off. Both the Bengalis and the Indians wanted a speedy solution, even at the risk of war. They wanted to prevent radical leftist elements from taking over the independence movement. America had reports that up to 100,000 Indian-trained guerrillas would infiltrate into East Pakistan in October and November that year. They would try to seize parts of northeast East Pakistan to house a provisional government. India would then recognize Bangladesh, a move that would almost certainly send the Pakistanis to war, Helms predicted.

Johnson had a separate report, indicating that some 40,000 guerrillas would go into East Pakistan by 15 October. He attributed the information to the U.S. mission in Kolkata, which received its information from Zahirul Qaiyum, an Awami League legislator.

Helms agreed the number would certainly be very large. The Indians believed that snow and bad weather in the north would keep Pakistan from overrunning Kashmir and would hinder the flow of Chinese aid to the Pakistanis. The guerrillas eventually would succeed in East Pakistan. The civil administration in East Pakistan failed to cope with enormous social, economic and political problems. In a few areas, the guerrillas had formed their own administrative structure. The Pakistani government had made little headway in winning over the people in East Pakistan and popular support for the insurgents seemed to be increasing.

Kissinger asked Moorer, Joint Chiefs chairman, to assess the military situation.

India, Moorer said, had a four-to-one ratio on the ground. "With regard to air forces, the outcome depends in large part on who preempts." He added, "The Indians can't compete with the Pakistani pilots." The naval forces did not amount to much. The Indians would undoubtedly try to blockade East Pakistan and probably could do so. The Pakistani army would give a good account of itself but would fail on the logistics problem. Eventually, the Indian army would gain a superior position because of its sheer advantage in size. They had large numbers on the ground, but then they might consider it necessary to keep five or six divisions on the Chinese border. Moorer said the main factor was that neither side could fight a war of attrition. They would quickly run out of supplies in four to six weeks, and India would prevail because of superior numbers.

Johnson added, "This is especially true in East Pakistan, where they will have a numerical advantage of regular forces, plus the support of the

Mukti Bahini.”

Kissinger then turned to what the Soviet Union was doing, recalling Gromyko’s claim during the previous week that the Russians were restraining the Indians. Were they doing this?

Helms replied, “All our evidence indicates this is true.”

Kissinger then asked, “In what way?”

Helms replied, “Madam Gandhi gave the Soviets a whole list of things she wanted. She asked them to arrange for Mujibur to be the go-between.”

“Kissinger: “The Indians have a great ability for determining the impossible and then demanding it.”

Johnson: “The Soviets were quite firm in telling the Indian representatives who went to Moscow that they would not support Bangladesh. The Soviets don’t want hostilities, if they can be avoided.”

Kissinger: “When I was in India recently, I formed the opinion that if the Indians were prepared to accept a slow evolution in Pakistan, we could work effectively with them, and they would eventually get most of what they want. But they keep lumping all these things together – the refugee problem, independence for Bangladesh, Pakistani forces on their borders. In their convoluted minds, they really believe they can give Pakistan a powerful blow from which it won’t recover and solve everything at once. If they would cooperate with us we could work with them on 90 percent of their problems, like releasing Mujibur or attaining some degree of autonomy for Bangladesh, and these steps would lead eventually to their getting it all.”

Van Hollen: “The Indians don’t have complete control over the Mukti Bahini. They couldn’t stop them all if they wanted to.”

Kissinger turned to Saunders and said, “Weren’t you with me when I talked with the [Indian] army chief of staff? He was so cocky, he thought he could defeat everyone in sight, all at the same time. We can’t ask them to shut off the guerrillas. It will get us nowhere.”

Van Hollen offered, “We could ask them to try to curb the guerrillas.”

Kissinger shot down the idea, saying, “No, that’s a nonstarter. We can’t ask them to cut off aid to the guerrillas. It’s an internal affair.”

Helms: “When you fatten up the guerrillas they become a different force. They aren’t the guerrillas any longer.”

Kissinger: “Yahya is a slow learner. He is very deliberate, but if you force him to make a decision, his Moslem instinct may assert itself, and perhaps he will start taking rapid action.”

Moorer: “If the Indians really want to punish the Pakistanis, they may be ready to go all the way to a break to do it.”

America’s efforts to undertake intensified relief efforts to allow Yahya an avenue for a peaceful solution in East Pakistan was highly ineffective because this strategy underestimated India’s resolve to use military force. America’s active diplomacy – instead of Kissinger’s decision to stay one step behind – could have helped Yahya open up his eyes and see his ruin in East Pakistan, leading him to develop pragmatic policies that could result in an entirely different outcome than that which actually happened. Kissinger also failed to realize the depth of India’s historical distrust of America. Given the divergent interests of India and the United States and their often-acrimonious ties, one would be hard-pressed to imagine Gandhi could put her full faith and confidence in Nixon to come to her rescue in a real crisis.

## India Beats War Drum

By September of that year, both India and Pakistan started preparing for a possible war. New Delhi informed Washington that time was running out for a peaceful solution and India might act by the year end to bring the crisis to an end.

To the Indians, it had become quite evident that the Mukti Bahini, on their own and even after their training in India, would be unable to face a pitched battle with the Pakistan army. New Delhi could ill-afford to prolong the war by proxy indefinitely because of the fear of a possible escalation and takeover by the leftists.

In the meantime, Pakistan also started preparing its armada. To the Americans, signals coming from South Asia clearly indicated a looming war. On 16 September, Saunders and Hoskinson wrote to Kissinger that both India and Pakistan had started taking increased military preparedness. "In some cases, these surpass those made before the war in 1965. Forces on both sides are now at a high state of alert, and other related measures have been taken against the contingency of the outbreak of war."

The most worrisome report, according to intelligence estimates, was that some units of India's armored division and an independent armored brigade had begun moving towards the West Pakistan border, opposite Lahore. This move was reportedly intended to warn Pakistan that New Delhi was ready to face any Pakistani incursion and to discourage any thoughts Islamabad might have had that it could successfully mount a preemptive strike against India.

However, the analysts wrote, the Pakistanis could interpret the move as an indication of India's plan to attack Pakistan, and Islamabad could show some drastic reaction, perhaps along the ceasefire line in Kashmir.

India also stepped up the pace on the political front. It played a guiding role in forming a multiparty Bangladesh "National Liberation Front", which was to function as an overall steering committee. The front included, among others, pro-Moscow communists, who were brought in at Indian and Soviet insistence. At least, the front broadened the base of the Bangladesh movement and strengthened the leftist hardliners against the pro-West moderates.

In a related move, India's foreign secretary publicly said India would recognize Bangladesh "very soon". Gandhi's major foreign policy advisers, including Kaul, privately held the view that war was inevitable.

India was coordinating with the Soviets to bring pressure to bear on Pakistan. Gromyko, for instance, had sternly warned Sultan Khan, Pakistan's foreign secretary, to refrain from hostilities, but offered no solution to Pakistan's problems.

Gandhi went to Moscow towards September end, possibly to assess Soviet reactions and support.

The American intelligence had difficulty to say exactly what the situation added up to. Based on statements by India, American diplomats assessed that it was not actually preparing to begin a direct attack on either East or West Pakistan. They interpreted the military moves taken by India as defensive measures against the possibility of an attack by Pakistan. They also believed India's actions were part of its plan to increase significantly its support to the insurgents, perhaps even involving Indian "volunteers," but not necessarily geared towards a general war.

India's strategy, according to this assumption, involved an attempt to capture some of the more isolated border areas in northwest East Pakistan and establish the Bangladesh government there. America thought that it was the right time to begin preparing for the likely Pakistani reaction by moving armor up to the Western front if the operation in the East were to begin in early October. The rains in East Pakistan would end soon. The area would be more conducive to military operations by early October. It appeared that the level of tension and the danger of war, at least by accident, had increased another notch in the recent weeks. War might not yet be the most likely outcome, but a grave sense of inevitability hovered over the subcontinent, influencing actions on both sides. Under these conditions and with tensions running so high, events could gain a momentum of their own, leading to a war that no one really wanted but all were willing to fight out of fear of losing, if they did not mobilize and go on the offensive.

Such assumption changed quickly, however. By October, the Americans started to foresee a possible war in South Asia, a realisation that prompted Washington to leap into action. On 8 October, the State Department sent a telegram to the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan, expressing deep concern over increasing risks of war over East Pakistan. Johnson instructed the ambassador in New Delhi to seek an immediate meeting with Gandhi to tell the Indian premier that "we are not convinced that intensified guerrilla activity will achieve results compatible with India's interests." He told the U.S. envoy to strongly urge India to immediately reduce the risks of war by restraining cross-border operations by the Mukti Bahini. "Should such cross-border operations lead to a conflict with Pakistan, this would have serious effect on US-India relations," he cautioned.

At the same time, Johnson told the U.S. charge in Pakistan to seek an urgent meeting with Yahya to tell him that "any military action initiated by Pakistan directed against India would have an adverse effect upon our relationship".

"You should make clear to Yahya that we continue to believe that the only long-term resolution of the current danger can be found through progress toward a political solution and accommodation in East Pakistan," Johnson told the envoy.

While Johnson sent notes to U.S. posts about heightened risks of war, Yahya wrote to Nixon, alerting him of "a warlike situation between Pakistan and India". "All available evidence indicates that Indian Armed Forces have been put in a state of readiness and moved to forward positions for offensive action at a short notice against our frontiers in both the wings," Yahya wrote. "An armed conflict between the two countries is likely to erupt, if it is not brought under control immediately."

Yahya was quick to add that the Russians told the Pakistanis the previous month in Moscow that India would not start a conflict because the Soviets were exercising restraining influence on India. "Unfortunately, the facts are quite different. The bulk of the Indian forces have moved in operational positions against our borders after the signing of Indo-Soviet Treaty and there has also been a marked increase in shelling and raids on our territory since then. Apparently, the Indians are either not amenable to the Soviet advice or are deliberately misleading them."

He indicated that Pakistan would seek a Security Council meeting to discuss the issue and sought America's help "for a constructive decision

and positive action by it". He, however, postponed the idea of a U.N. meeting after the Americans told Pakistan that "a discussion in the Security Council might generate a good deal of emotion, fail to achieve anything constructive, and thus serve to further polarize the situation. There was the additional concern that India would broaden the discussion to include the entire range of problems affecting relations between India and Pakistan."

## Jha Gives Kissinger Ultimatum

On 8 October, Jha gave Kissinger an ultimatum during a meeting, which followed a conversation between the two some weeks earlier when Kissinger had mentioned that a year's interval was needed for a political settlement in Pakistan. Jha told Kissinger that they simply did not have the luxury of a year – India would be forced into some military action by year-end. The ten million refugees in West Bengal would break India's political cohesion; they were all Bengalis and did not leave West Bengal. In West Bengal, they would tip the power balance totally in a Maoist direction. Finally, the huge financial costs would be more likely to cause bankruptcy than a war.

Kissinger responded with a dire warning: "Have no misunderstanding: If you start a war we will cut off all economic aid and you must include that in your cost calculation." He said that if the constant harassment of the president in the Indian press and the constant playing with America's political opponents did not cease, the ambassador could not expect a very forthcoming attitude on the part of the United States.

Jha, in his typical manner, put all the blame at the footsteps of the pro-Soviet group in New Delhi for all the problems hounding Indo-American relations. He told Kissinger that the pro-Soviet axis in India was currently in some difficulty, because apparently the Soviet Union had given the strongest warnings against unilateral Indian actions against Pakistan. New Delhi believed Moscow seemed to be participating in delaying maneuvers.

Jha's remarks sounded alarm bells in Washington. The State Department asked the U.S. ambassador to meet immediately with Gandhi to propose that both India and Pakistan pull back forces from the borders. When Keating sought an appointment with Gandhi, he was told that the prime minister could not immediately meet with him as she was quite occupied. The envoy then met with the External Affairs minister on 12 October. Swaran Singh told Keating that the insurgency existed deep within East Pakistan and the significance of cross-border activities were being easily exaggerated. He said New Delhi could not order to "shoot down the East Bengalis entering or departing India." Singh confirmed that India did not anticipate a huge infiltration by Mukti Bahini. On the U.S. proposal to pull out forces, he remained vague. In the event Pakistan did withdraw its troops, he said, India could reconsider the situation based on the circumstances at such time.

When Keating began speaking of how Indo-U.S. relations would suffer if the guerrilla operations in East Pakistan escalated into a war, Singh interrupted him. Singh repeated the scenario and asked Keating if he understood correctly that if an armed conflict took place because of Pakistani incursions against India in retaliation for successful guerrilla activity in East Pakistan, Indo-U.S. relations would be adversely affected and it also would be injurious to US-Pak relations.

"I replied, large cross-border activities, supported by the Indian army, which resulted in a military conflict with Pakistan, would be injurious to Indo-U.S. relations. If Pakistan were to attack India, I was convinced U.S.-Pak relations similarly would be seriously affected," Keating said in a telegram to the State Department. He told Singh that Washington was delivering the same warning to Islamabad. America also urged Pakistan to move rapidly towards a political settlement with the Bengalis.

Keating's remarks provoked Singh. He told Keating – who was by then at the tail-end of his posting in India – that he wanted to take the opportunity to give the envoy a perspective about the Bangladesh situation. Singh said the hard core of the freedom fighters was formed by trained former Bengali military and police personnel of about 45,000. The highly motivated and embittered East Bengali youth were participating in the insurgency in large numbers. If out of some 9.5 million refugees only one percent, or 95,000, were highly motivated activists, the number was a reasonable enough figure of insurgents; add to that the former Bengali police and military who would join them

Singh said the insurgents were reasonably well-equipped with weapons taken upon defection or otherwise liberated from the Pakistan army, as well as with weaponry purchased in Europe by a fairly large number of well-to-do Bengalis living abroad. Singh stated that India could not stop these activities; it had tried to explain basic realities and greatly resented the natural process of the growing Bengali resistance being interpreted by the United States as bolstered from India.

He urged the United States to consider the profound, alienated attitudes of the Bengalis as shown by the defections of well-placed Pakistani diplomats, the most recent one being the Pakistani ambassador in Buenos Aires. History knows no parallel and the situation shows even hard-eyed diplomats taking decisions. India's impression was that such psychological factors were not appreciated in Washington, which was blinded by the Pakistani military regime's charisma. History would show that the United States had the greatest responsibility in the present situation since its support for Pakistan had contributed to the reinforcement and continuation of Pakistan's military repression.

He told the ambassador that America should "exercise its immense influence with Yahya to bring him to reality." Continuing the U.S. support to the Yahya regime would only deepen the rift between East and West Pakistan and make the struggle in East Pakistan more bitter. It would kill a negotiated deal. Singh said the recent statement of Bangladesh authorities dismissing a compromise was an indirect repudiation of his statement. Singh had told an All India Congress Committee meeting that "Bangladesh might be realized within the framework of Pakistan, autonomy, or independence."

When Keating attempted to verify whether the freedom fighters would go into East Pakistan in large numbers beginning in October, as the intelligence reports from Washington indicated, Singh provided more than a diplomatic answer. The Mukti Bahini, he said, did not take India or its army into confidence and "has never consulted us." The Mukti Bahini had its own tactics, he added, stressing that India refused to believe that the freedom fighters who were on "the Indian border in such large numbers prepared to march openly into East Pakistan".

Singh assured Keating, "India will never attack Pakistani positions and will never commit any incursions against Pakistan territory. If Pakistan starts war, India will defend itself with every possible means available."

On 15 October, Rogers sent a telegram to the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi in the light of the responses from India and Pakistan regarding pulling back soldiers from their respective borders. In his note, the secretary of state conveyed to India Yahya's assurance that Pakistan would not initiate war. Yahya accepted in principle the U.S. proposal and suggested the military chiefs of the two countries meet to work out the details. Rogers told the embassy to elicit India's response to Yahya's suggestion. He also sent a note to the U.S. mission in Moscow to brief Gromyko about the U.S. withdrawal idea.

The next day, the U.S. charge met with India's foreign secretary and made a presentation based on Rogers' instructions. Kaul responded by reiterating Singh's pledge that India would not wage war with Pakistan. He, however, said India viewed Pakistan's recent military moves as a threat to attack India, despite Yahya's promise to the contrary. So, India could not accept America's proposal for a mutual withdrawal of forces until such a threat had been removed.

In Moscow, meanwhile, the U.S. ambassador met with Gromyko on 18 October to urge the Soviet Union to support the U.S. withdrawal proposal. Ambassador Jacob Beam told the Soviet foreign minister that Yahya had accepted the proposal, but Singh had gone no further than to state that if Pakistan withdrew then India would reconsider the situation. Beam asked Gromyko to encourage India to accept the plan.

Gromyko said India and Pakistan had both indicated they would not initiate hostilities, but the conclusion drawn in Moscow was that while India's assurance could be trusted, Yahya's could not. Gromyko did not agree to support the withdrawal proposal. He argued that separating the troops was a good idea but not a solution, and urged America to join the Russians in finding a political settlement.

## Yahya Begins Worrying About War

In Pakistan, Yahya started worrying about facing war. On 19 October, the deputy chief of Pakistan's embassy in Washington, delivered a letter to the White House from Yahya to brief Nixon about the latest situation in the subcontinent. "In an already tense situation, India's land, sea and air forces have been brought to a state of confrontation against Pakistan's frontiers in both the wings," the general wrote. He said India had amassed seven divisions against West Pakistan and put additional forces in a state of readiness to move to forward positions at a short notice. Nearly eight divisions had encircled East Pakistan. Substantial forward moves had taken place from the rear to the forward positions. In addition, the deployment of Indian forces on the Sino-Indian borders had been rearranged so that they could be simultaneously used in an offensive against Pakistan.

"Our concern is all the more grave since India has shown no inclination to give up its policy of instigating and assisting armed infiltration into East Pakistan. It continues to support, train and launch rebels and insurgents who seek the dismemberment and destruction of Pakistan. I am constrained to say that if this state of affairs continues it may lead to dangerous consequences: a situation which we in Pakistan – and I am sure all the friends of Pakistan and India, particularly, the United States – would wish to avoid," Yahya wrote. He urged Nixon to take up this matter in his talks with Gandhi during her forthcoming visit to Washington in November.

Yahya's assessment was confirmed by the U.S. intelligence. The CIA told the White House on 19 October that all Indian armed forces had been placed on full alert. Nearly twenty-six squadrons, including supersonic airplanes, were positioned against Pakistan. There was a virtual combat air ring around East Pakistan for offensive purposes. The Indian navy had been put to a state of war-preparedness with sixty percent of its forces deployed against the coasts of West Pakistan. The remaining strength of the Indian navy was positioned to move against the East Pakistan shores. The inevitable conclusion that one could draw from this offensive posture was that it was pointed in the direction of conflict – and not of peace.

On 20 October, the consulate general in Dhaka sent a dispatch to Washington, assessing the guerrilla war in East Pakistan, showing a widespread escalation. The "insurgency has increased in tempo and geographic scope in last three months," the consulate said. Still the liberation fighters were unable to challenge the Pakistan army in urban areas, but showing increasing capability to carry out ambushes and hit-and-run attacks in certain areas, while limited-to-minor sabotage elsewhere.

The American diplomats in Dhaka also noted that Islamabad's efforts to reduce popular support by "civilization" and the general amnesty had been unsuccessful, except for possibly among the middle class in cities. The insurgency's future course would depend heavily on the Indian support, the tenacity of Islamabad, and the quality of the Bengali leadership, whether Mujib or the other emerging leader.

The consulate general felt that the Mukti Bahini was now sufficiently established in many areas and had enough cohesion to sustain itself even if India cut down its support. Continued Indian support would inevitably further extend the Mukti Bahini operational range. Still, in the foreseeable future, the freedom fighters were "not likely to present a dangerous threat to the Pakistani army, despite probable increases in numbers and scope of activity." In contrast with the situation in Vietnam, the telegram added, the insurgency did "not possess redoubt in which it can concentrate masses of supplies and weapons, nor are there protected trails through which large quantities of heavy equipment can reach them from an easily accessible seaport."

For many months to come, the consulate incorrectly predicted that the Pakistani army would certainly retain an advantage in equipment and training. On the other hand, even at the present activity level, the Mukti Bahini was a serious thorn in the army's side.

"We have no means of an accurate assessment of army casualties, but indications are that figure may run as high as 10 to 12 killed daily, with a corresponding number of wounded." While not in itself crippling to the Pakistani army contingent in East Pakistan, these figures over an extended period could create serious morale problem among the troops far from home, living among unfriendly people and in difficult and wearing climate, the consulate observed.

The Dhaka mission also sensed that the military authorities in East Pakistan were obviously concerned. Precautions were being taken to protect vulnerable points in the city. Brick walls with rifle or machine-gun ports were being constructed around the airport, electric power stations and other strategic points, while sandbagged strong points were set up at many places along principal streets. Security checkpoints were being maintained along main roads, and occasionally set up unexpectedly at other places. Several pillboxes and fortifications had been installed along the northern rim of the Gulshan residential area in Dhaka.

Giving his take on the political dynamic, the consul general told Washington that "while we still believe that Sheikh Mujib, released and allowed freedom of action, could assert control over the Mukti Bahini and use it as a disciplined instrument of his policy, longer he is restrained more likely we consider it that a new leadership will emerge from among the Mukti Bahini, which, tempered by fighting and action-orientation, might one day challenge both Mujib and the old Awami League leadership for the primacy in the independent or largely autonomous East Bengal."

Whether such an eventual leadership would be oriented towards the right or left was impossible to predict, Consul General Herbert D. Spivack concluded.

On 22 October, the State Department cautioned Nixon of a strong possibility of war. "We have no information that either side intends to take

the initiative at this time,” but a possible indicator of the level of tensions would be whether Gandhi began her three-week international tour on 24 October.

Rogers said the mutual withdrawal of troops, as proposed by Washington, appeared unlikely to be accepted by India. So he was recommending that Yahya unilaterally make a limited pullback “as a signal to the Indians of his desire to de-escalate and reduce tensions. We believe he might be willing to do this without jeopardizing his military position in order to put the onus on the Indians to take a reciprocal action.”

India was in no mood to reciprocate even if Yahya made such a unilateral gesture. In India, things rather started to look more warlike and the Indian officials were busy with something remote from pulling out troops. On 22 October, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Nikolai Firyubin visited New Delhi for five days. Marshal Pavel Kutakhov, deputy defense minister and chief of staff of the Soviet Air Force, arrived on 28 October with a delegation. Kutakhov conveyed a Soviet willingness to discuss an emergency military supply program for India. Moscow had already promised to aid India if Pakistan attacked.

As the Soviet officials toured India, Hoskinson and Saunders briefed Nixon on their visits.

“From all indications, the Soviets appear to be keeping an unusually close watch on the situation in South Asia,” they wrote. “If nothing else, this is a graphic demonstration of the consultation clause in the new ‘friendship’ treaty. It also would seem to reflect Soviet concern that the Indo-Pak military confrontation could blow up into full-scale fighting. By visibly demonstrating their support for India, the Soviets may hope to deter the Pakistanis from taking any rash action.”

In Pakistan, Yahya received a friendly message from Washington. On 2 November, Farland met with the general in Islamabad to convey the message of a unilateral pullback as Irwin suggested. Yahya agreed to withdraw military units as a first step towards defusing the explosive situation.

A relieved Farland reported back to Washington, “Yahya didn’t hesitate at all, saying spontaneously, ‘Of course, I will. Now this doesn’t mean that I would pull the troops back into the barracks, but I will gladly promise to make the first move back from a forward military position.’ ”

At that time, Yahya appeared more flexible than ever before, telling Farland, “What I want your government to know is that in order to bring normalcy back to the subcontinent, I will do anything within my power short of simply turning Pakistan over to India.”

When Kissinger briefed Nixon, he described Yahya’s decision as “significant,” and noted that while delivering the message, the Pakistani ambassador emphasized the risk that Yahya took to accept the unilateral withdrawal idea. “He would be taking a concrete step on the basis of an oral statement,” Kissinger wrote, adding that Gandhi could later disavow her promise to reciprocate on a pretext such as saying the situation had changed.

“If India attacked, he would be vulnerable to charges of jeopardizing Pakistan’s security. Despite this risk, he has sent this reply because of his trust in you,” Kissinger told Nixon, underscoring the depth of the administration’s friendship with the general.

Gandhi, who showed courage and sound judgement in handling the crisis in the face of extreme domestic pressure and external threat, voiced reservations about the pull-back idea during a meeting with Prime Minister Heath in London before her departure for Washington to meet with Nixon. She also did not rule out using force to resolve the East Pakistan problem. Her wait was now for the right time and right pretext to strike.

## Gandhi Goes to Washington

On 11 October, Jha met with Kissinger to discuss Gandhi's visit to Washington. Before discussing serious matters, Kissinger told the Indian ambassador that a U.S. military plane would be provided to bring Gandhi to the Andrews Air Force Base from New York, as Jha had earlier requested.

When the two turned to serious issues, Jha quickly blurted out a question in an effort to sway the administration from its pro-Pakistan position. He asked what interest America had in keeping East Bengal a part of Pakistan.

Kissinger replied that Jha had misunderstood U.S. policy. "We had no interest in keeping East Bengal a part of Pakistan," Kissinger began. "We did have an interest in preventing an outbreak of war and preventing that issue from turning into an international conflict. As for the rest, we would not take any active position one way or another."

Jha pointed out that India was facing tremendous pressures.

Kissinger shot back, saying some of those pressures were self-generated.

Jha, unsurprisingly, blamed Haksar and Kaul for India's trouble with America. Haksar, he said, was on his way out; maybe Kaul, too. But it was difficult to tell who would replace him and whether the replacement would be any better. "If we played our hand intelligently," Jha said, "it >would even turn out that India might now look for a compensating move to take towards the United States."

Kissinger promised to reciprocate such gestures in kind, but sounded a note of caution: "We would certainly be ready, but it was important for India not to be playing with the president. If it turned out that some of our reports were correct, that India was using the visit to the president to cover an imminent attack on Pakistan, our relations would not recover so soon."

As Gandhi's trip approached, the White House started receiving word about India's concerns that Nixon might mistreat the prime minister. On 29 September Kissinger received a phone call from the former U.S. ambassador to India, John Kenneth Galbraith. He had recently met with Gandhi, who expressed to him her anxiety about the kind of reception she would receive in Washington. Galbraith said that one of her assistants told him that "she was afraid of some brush-off at the White House, which would be very damaging." Galbraith urged that Nixon send a personal note "saying he is looking forward to her visit, getting better acquainted, understanding her problems on the subcontinent."

Kissinger assured Galbraith that Gandhi would be received with "special courtesy," and that the type of note Galbraith suggested had already been sent to the prime minister. Nixon had written to Gandhi, saying he was looking forward to wide-ranging discussions.

On 8 October Jha met with Kissinger again. The ambassador began the conversation by discussing Gandhi's upcoming visit. He had noticed some coolness on the part of the protocol team and wanted an assurance that the prime minister would receive a warm welcome in Washington. Kissinger reassured Jha of a cordial reception. He then telephoned Robert Mosbacher, the State Department protocol chief, in Jha's presence to make sure the ambassador heard that Kissinger had given instructions about the need for a Grade-A treatment for the Indian premier.

Gandhi met with Nixon in the White House on 4 November. Haksar and Kissinger were the only two aides present at the two-hour discussion. While Nixon met with Gandhi in the Oval Office, U.S. and Indian advisers met in the Cabinet Room. Sisco headed the American team, which included Keating, Van Hollen, Saunders, and Schneider. Kaul headed the Indian delegation, which included Jha and Maharaja Krishna Rasgotra, minister for political affairs at the Indian Embassy in Washington.

Nixon suggested to Gandhi that they use the first session to discuss the situation in South Asia and the second session for a discussion of broader issues, including China, the Soviet Union, and Southeast Asia. Gandhi agreed and expressed India's admiration for Nixon's skill in handling the Vietnam situation and his initiative to establish a normal relationship with China. However, Gandhi feared that Nixon's China move posed a serious threat to India's security.

Gandhi observed that America's each move had been carefully thought-out and well-designed. Nixon said he expected much criticism domestically from more conservative elements opposed to the normalisation of relationships with China. On the other hand, he was convinced that the steps had to be taken to bring stability to Asia, which could best be done when the parties could communicate – and this had been his initial objective.

Nixon then moved right into the situation in South Asia, cautioning Gandhi that an Indo-Pak war would be unacceptable from every perspective. For this reason, America's Pakistan policy had been shaped by an imperative to retain influence with Islamabad. He assured Gandhi the United States had discouraged military actions by Pakistan and would continue to do so.

Addressing the East Pakistan issue, he said Yahya appointed a civilian governor in East Pakistan at America's urging. Nixon then listed the results his policies had squeezed from Yahya: Yahya's amnesty and his promise to welcome back both Hindu and Muslim refugees were among them. He also cited Yahya's pledge not to execute Mujib; Yahya's agreement to pull some military units back from Pakistan's western border; and his vow to hold direct discussions with cleared Awami League leaders. Besides, the president noted Yahya's willingness to meet with a Bangladesh leader from India and to consider our America's suggestion that Mujib be allowed to designate the representative.

He said he understood India's concerns about the refugees, but "the United States could not urge policies which would be tantamount to overthrowing" Yahya. "It is recognized that Mujib is a core factor in the situation and that unquestionably in the long run Pakistan must acquiesce in the direction of greater autonomy for East Pakistan, but the situation is extremely fragile and Yahya's flexibility is very limited in the short run. Unquestionably Mujib's fate is an essential aspect of the problem and ultimately he will have to play a role in East Pakistan's future. However, this depends largely on the way events proceed in the shorter term. The greatest danger of all would result if either side were to consider that the military action could provide a solution that only a historical process can settle. Should India resort to force of arms, the current balance suggests that it would succeed in a military sense but in a political sense there could be no winner."

He said the military action's consequences were "dangerous". In this regard, he said, India's agreement with the Soviet Union was understood

by his administration, but India must recognize that it was unpopular in America. It must, therefore, affect the U.S. government's general attitude. Should the situation deteriorate to war, it could extend beyond India and Pakistan. The Americans would not understand if India were to attack Pakistan. While Washington could not expect India to determine its own policies based solely on U.S. attitudes, these attitudes should be taken into consideration, Nixon suggested.

Nixon then asked Gandhi if Yahya could really survive if Mujib were released at that point in time. Gandhi avoided an answer to this question. She stated that India was not being driven by anti-Pakistan motives. India had never wished to destroy Pakistan nor cause it to be permanently crippled. Rather, India sought to restore stability in the region. Recalling the genesis of the subcontinent's Partition, she noted that the solution, largely dictated from abroad, had left the peoples restive and dissatisfied.

Nixon agreed that the Partitioning had contributed to a permanent instability.

Gandhi observed that many harbor the feeling that her father had let the country down by accepting the Partition along the lines ultimately reached. Nevertheless, once the decision had been taken, it was accepted. But the Partitioning generated a persistent "hate India" campaign, resulting in successive conflicts in 1947 and 1965.

Following India's Independence, the freedom movement leaders formed the country's government. At the same time, the loyalist or pro-British factions formed Pakistan's government. Pakistan proceeded to imprison or exile the Independence movement leaders. Baluchistan and Northwest Frontier provinces had a strong desire for greater autonomy. There had been a long history of separatist politics in Pakistan, which had not necessarily been supported in India. Yahya was mistaken in trying to suppress Mujib. India had always reflected a degree of forbearance towards its own separatist elements. The pattern had been clear. West Pakistan had dealt with the Bengalis in a treacherous and deceitful way and had always relegated them to an inferior role. As the situation worsened, India attempted to alleviate it by maintaining communication with all the parties.

Nixon noted that many of the tactics being employed by the Bengalis were worsening the dilemma. For example, it was difficult to understand their motives in harassing and sabotaging the flow of humanitarian aid being carried in ships to Chittagong Harbor. Also, there was a perception that because guerrilla activity of that type must involve sophisticated training and equipment, India must be training and arming these guerrillas.

## **Gandhi Tells Nixon Pakistan Unity "Unrealistic"**

Gandhi took issue with Nixon's comment. She said there were, of course, continuing accusations that India had instigated the guerrilla movement and continued to support it. However, the realities were that it was no longer realistic to expect East and West Pakistan to remain together, as the pressures for autonomy were overwhelming.

She said Yahya continued to speak of a "Holy War". It might well be that the presence of Indian forces along Pakistan's frontier had deterred the initiation of military action by Pakistan thus far. This tense situation had influenced India towards entering into a treaty with the Soviet Union as a means of creating an additional deterrent. Stability in India was an important objective to the Soviet Union and, therefore, Moscow had long pressed for a political solution. Many in India had opposed the Soviet treaty and a majority of the parliament was concerned about it, too.

Nixon asked Gandhi for her views on how a solution could be achieved. Gandhi again avoided an answer, instead reiterating that her major concern was how the situation affected India itself. The crucial issue remained the future of Mujib, who was the symbol of the imperative for autonomy.

Nixon expressed his understanding for India's problem in undertaking the displacement of forces and noted that Yahya had indicated his willingness to undertake some pullback. If India now believed that such a step would not contribute to the lessening of tensions, it would be necessary for the United States to reconsider its efforts to effect such a pullback by Pakistani forces.

Gandhi did not address Nixon's proposal to consider withdrawing forces.

However, India's external affairs secretary responded to the proposal during the Gandhi-Rogers meeting on 5 November. In that meeting, Kaul said a withdrawal without political settlement would incorrectly suggest that the crisis was coming under control. Rogers responded that the political settlement would be difficult under the threat of an imminent war. If war started, there could not be a political solution. On the other hand, without a political solution, war was likely to start, the secretary of state added.

Gandhi replied that India doubted whether Yahya actually desired a political solution. But both Rogers and Sisco disagreed, saying they believed that the military ruler of Pakistan sincerely sought a solution; that he, in fact, felt that he had to have one.

To counter that view, and prove Yahya's lack of sincerity, the Indians presented a detailed recent history of East Pakistan's events. When asked what evidence America had that Yahya, in fact, sought a political solution, Rogers presented none. He only said he wanted to make it clear that the United States had done all it could in this regard. Haksar intervened to say this was not a matter in dispute between America and India. When the Indians questioned Yahya's motives, they did not mean to castigate the United States. It was just an attempt to reach an understanding with Washington about East Pakistan.

After the Rogers-Gandhi meeting, Kaul told Sisco that if India "could be assured that there had been contact with Mujib and that Mujib, free of coercion, had designated an individual to negotiate with Yahya, India could give this proposal its cautious support."

On 5 November, Nixon discussed with Kissinger his conversation with Gandhi. Kissinger's overall assessment was that "the Indians are bastards anyway. They are starting a war there . . . To them East Pakistan is no longer the issue. Now, I found it very interesting how she carried on to you yesterday about West Pakistan."

Kissinger felt, however, that Nixon had achieved his objective in his talks with the Indian premier: "While she was a bitch, we got what we wanted too . . . She will not be able to go home and say that the United States didn't give her a warm reception and, therefore, in despair she's got to go to war." Kissinger judged that Gandhi's objective had been thwarted: "She would rather have had you give her a cool reception so that she could say that she was really put upon." Nixon agreed: "We really slobbered over the old witch."

Kissinger felt that nothing of importance had been conceded on matters of substance: "You slobbered over her in things that did not matter, but in things that did matter, you didn't give her an inch." Nixon and Kissinger agreed that during the conversation the next day with Gandhi the approach the president would take was to be "a shade cooler", allowing her to do more to carry the conversation than had been the case in the



initial conversation.

Nixon and Gandhi met in the Oval Office at 11:20 a.m. the next day for the second round of their talks. Kissinger and Haksar also attended. Nixon opened the dialogue by outlining the objectives of his planned China trip. Then the conversation, which lasted an hour, became a virtual diplomatic tour d'horizon, touching on many trouble spots of the world, but with scant reference to South Asia.

As America began pondering its next move in the light of the unfolding events, on 20 November Kissinger wrote a memo to Nixon, quoting the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan. Farland had said Yahya felt that "Mujib was not the key to negotiations but rather Indira Gandhi held 'both the key and the lock'." According to a telegram Farland sent to Washington, Yahya declined to permit Mujib to designate a Bangladesh representative who could speak on his own behalf and negotiate for the Bangladesh movement with the Pakistanis. On the other hand, his government would be happy to meet with the Bangladesh representatives under other conditions as he had said before – only those without a charge against them could meet, if they renounced the Awami League banner. He sketched his scenario for a political settlement through the promulgation of a constitution in mid-December, convening the National Assembly on 27 December and the transfer of power "several weeks" thereafter. Then the new civilian government could, if it wished, deal with Mujib and Bangladesh.

Farland had the impression that Yahya believed he was being boxed in by many pressures on him from home and abroad. For the first time he sensed agitation in Yahya. The ambassador thought that Yahya had decided that his political plan was the only means of extricating himself from an untenable military and economic situation inflamed and fueled by India.

Regarding the situation in India, Kissinger incorrectly suggested in his memo to Nixon that Gandhi was attempting to lower the political temperature, for the time being, at least. She seemed prepared to wait for some unspecified period to see whether the international community's efforts to get Yahya into a dialogue with the Awami League were successful before initiating a more decisive action. Gandhi remained, as before her trip to Washington, less hawkish than the country as a whole and that she apparently continued to work to avoid a major war.

The American intelligence community, however, painted a sharply different picture, saying that despite her dovish public posture, Gandhi was going full-steam ahead with her plan "for a possible military intervention in East Pakistan".

## India Beats War Drum

Upon her return from Washington, Gandhi embarked upon marching ahead on the war path. On 16 November, she sent a letter to Nixon, giving a hint that India could soon make its military move to end the East Pakistan crisis and expressing her dismay over the U.S. actions.

"I hope that the vast prestige of the United States and its wisdom, which you personify, will be used to find a political solution acceptable to the elected representatives of East Bengal and their leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman," she wrote. "On my part, I shall make every effort to urge patience on our people. However, I would be less than honest if I were not to repeat that the situation in which we find ourselves has long been an unbearable one."

She took issue with the U.S. initiative to get the Security Council involved. "I am somewhat concerned to learn of efforts to involve the Security Council. However well-intentioned these may be, I have little doubt that any public debate at this stage will lead to a hardening of attitudes, which would make the task of reconciliation an extremely difficult one. This is part of the common experience of many countries. Such a move would obstruct the path of the solutions which we jointly seek."

Washington failed to grasp the full extent of Gandhi's message. On 19 November, Hoskinson and Saunders prepared a briefing for Nixon on South Asia. It said Gandhi was "attempting to lower the political temperature," at least for now. "She seems to be telling the Indian people and the world that, while she has no intention of reducing the pressure on Pakistan by withdrawing Indian troops from the frontiers or reducing support to the guerrillas, she is prepared to wait for some unspecified period to see whether the international community's efforts to get Yahya into a dialogue with the Awami League are successful before initiating more decisive action."

It noted that comments from Indian and foreign observers suggested Gandhi remained "less hawkish than the country as a whole and that she apparently continues to work to avoid a major war."

However, the briefing added, "our intelligence indicates that complementing this public posture is continuing planning for possible military intervention in East Pakistan and serious incidents, reflecting an aggressive Indian posture in support of the guerrillas, continue to flare up along the East Pakistan border."

The report also cautioned that some official U.S. observers believed that the Indian and guerrilla pressures on the Pakistan forces could be gradually building up to a point at which they would be goaded into counteractions, which could precipitate a full-scale war.

On 22 November, Cushman told Kissinger that press reports from Pakistan indicated India had attacked East Pakistan in the Jessore area with two infantry divisions supported by armor. Even if the reports were exaggerated, the size of Indian incursions was apparently increasing. Yahya did not want to fight a war he knew Pakistan would probably lose, but Cushman concluded the general might soon decide that he had no choice but to do so.

The reports sparked debates in Washington as to the goal of increased military actions in the border. Irwin said Pakistan was probably overplaying the situation, while India was underplaying it. "We think increased participation by Indian regulars is designed either to put enough pressure on Yahya to get a more favorable political situation or to try to provoke a Pakistani attack on India and thereby put Pakistan further in the wrong in the eyes of the world. We believe the first reason is more likely than the second."

He suggested that the United States go back to Yahya on the basis of his latest conversation with Farland, which Washington "found somewhat disappointing with regard to Mujib". He supported getting a U.N. resolution, saying it would put pressure on India and help avoid a war.

Kissinger took issue with the last suggestion, noting that India would go to war unless Pakistan met its political demands.

Sisco then reminded the team, "Our objective is to try to discourage war on the subcontinent."

Kissinger replied, "We can do that by giving India what she wants. We can also do it by discouraging India from using military force to break up Pakistan. The Indians are trying to break off East Pakistan in a fashion so traumatic as to bring West Pakistan to collapse."

Sisco's replied: "I think we can assume India will keep the pressure on, both militarily and politically."

Kissinger said: "I'm not sure they want Mujib to settle the situation in East Pakistan; I think they want the situation to collapse."

Irwin suggested that the United States go back to Yahya and tell him, "if he were willing to talk to Mujib, it might possibly dilute the military pressure on East Pakistan."

Sisco opposed the idea, saying, "If the Indian military activity is confirmed, I don't think it would be wise to go back to Yahya to press him on the Mujib talks."

On that same day, 22 November, Pakistan claimed in radio broadcasts that India, "without a formal declaration of war, has launched an all-out offensive against East Pakistan." The attack was concentrated in the Jessore sector and included infantry, armor, and aircraft.

Kissinger initially reported it in a telephone conversation with Nixon at 12:45 p.m. of 22 November. The fighting had flared up in several other locations along the East Pakistan border, but India dismissed the reports as "absolutely false". India reported that several Pakistani planes had intruded into its airspace and that the Pakistanis were trying to increase tension and create a "warlike situation." Some Indian radio broadcasts disclosed that a "concerted" guerrilla offensive was underway.

"At this point, we have no independent evidence, but it seems apparent that there has been a major incident," Kissinger told Nixon. He then offered possible explanations of what might have happened. The Indians might be supporting a major guerrilla offensive, he said, or they might have begun a joint action that would continue with the Indian regular forces seeking control of a major area rather than one of the smaller border areas that had been the object of actions over the past few weeks. Or Pakistan might have decided that war was inevitable and could have decided to accuse India of having begun it, to free itself from whatever reaction they may feel necessary.

Nixon ordered to cut aid to both India and Pakistan, making good on his threat. Kissinger panicked: "We haven't completely cut it to Pakistan yet. That might put them over the brink."

On 23 November, Kissinger convened the Washington Action Group, where Cushman summarized reports of the fighting. Pakistan alleged that Indian armed forces had penetrated eight miles into East Pakistan in the Jessore area. Other information, however, indicated that the Indian and Mukti Bahini forces had attacked in strength, but they had not pushed back the Pakistani forces around Jessore.

Yahya told Farland in Islamabad that India had initiated offensive operations against Pakistan, with the Indian spear-heads directed against the Chalna and Chittagong ports in East Pakistan. In the Chittagong sector, the Indian forces had penetrated twenty miles into Pakistan. In response, the general was declaring a national emergency.

Yahya detailed the attacks in a letter delivered to Nixon on 23 November saying Pakistan would mount a vigorous defense of its territory. Yahya still hoped to avoid an all-out war, but added that the Indian attacks in East Pakistan were pushing Pakistan to the point of no return.

Kissinger asked Cushman if the flareups were "a limited operation or will they keep going?"

Cushman replied, "It looks like a limited operation to us."

On 24 November, the group met again. America was still getting conflicting Pakistani and Indian versions of what was going on, but had little doubt that regular Indian troops had indeed entered Pakistan.

"Is there any doubt in the mind of anyone in this room that the Indians have attacked with regular units across the Pakistan border?" Kissinger asked. "And, if there is, does it make any difference? Can we possibly believe that these are the guerrillas attacking across hundreds of miles, with tanks and aircraft – that this is an indigenous movement?"

Samuel DePalma, assistant secretary of state for International Organization Affairs, was the first to reply: "There is no question that these forces are armed and supplied from the outside, but we can't make an airtight case in the United Nations."

The other officials present then added their own views.

Kissinger: "The question is what hard data we have to support whatever action we want to take. We have no doubt that India is involved and that they are probably across the border. But we need something to nail down the exact nature of their activity and we need it in a day or two."

Moorer: "They may be making a distinction between their regular forces and their border security forces."

Irwin: "What do you think their purpose is? Are they trying to cut off supplies? Are they primarily supporting the Bangladesh guerrillas, or are they planning to go further? Are they putting forces in to take and hold territory or to protect the Bangladesh?"

Moorer: "Initially to support the Bangladesh, and then to whip the hell out of the Pakistanis. The Bangladesh are moving to the border where the Indians can assist in attriting [sic] the Pakistanis."

Kissinger: "So our situation is that we don't know enough now to do anything, and by the time they are in Dacca, it will be too late to do anything. In these circumstances, we should move early rather than later, since if we are late, any move we make will be ineffectual. That is our dilemma."

Moorer was confident that the Indian forces were inside the East Pakistan border, but he did not think they had the drive to penetrate deeply.

Irwin said they could cut two vital supply routes with only a short penetration, something that they had not done yet.

Moorer said, however, that they lacked enough forces for a deep penetration. "I think they're trying to open up the Paks so the guerrillas can defeat them. The Paks have only a limited reinforcement capability. The Indian Navy could prevent reinforcement."

Kissinger asked, "Do you seriously believe India wants reconciliation? Don't they control the situation?"

Sisco replied, "In answer to your first question, No, I don't. I was merely stating one option – the transfer of the problem by Yahya to Bhutto. Another option is for Yahya to deal with Mujib directly."

Kissinger: "Why can't Bhutto deal with Mujib?"

Sisco: "He might, but there is considerably less prospect of success. Not only are the Bengalis very reluctant to deal with Bhutto, but Bhutto and Mujib are potential rivals. The likelihood of a Mujib-Bhutto reconciliation is considerably less than the Bengalis agreeing to talk to Yahya."

Kissinger: "But that assumes that the difficulty is between East and West Pakistan. Nothing India has done indicates that they want to see a reconciliation between East and West Pakistan."

Sisco: "I don't think Mujib's objective in March was complete separatism or independence. Even now, I don't think some form of loose confederation between Yahya and Mujib is impossible."

Kissinger: "So, India having attacked Pakistan, the logical conclusion is that we should squeeze Yahya to talk to Mujib. What the Indian troops can't achieve, we should achieve for them. That's the implication of what you're saying."

Sisco: "I have asked myself why the Pakistanis haven't already moved into the United Nations. It would seem to be very attractive to them, particularly since they are the weaker power and there is a possibility that the United Nations could dampen the immediate military situation. But, to be a reality, the Security Council would have to defuse the situation and would immediately get into the question of political accommodation. If Yahya is not able to move toward Mujib directly, why should he not use the United Nations as a facade?"

Kissinger: "Unless he doesn't want to do it at all."

Sisco: "I agree. He has three options: Do it directly with Mujib; do it through the United Nations; don't do it at all. If East and West Pakistan can't get together, the United States can live with an independent East Pakistan."

Kissinger: "We don't give a damn."

Sisco: "However, Yahya, by going to the United Nations, will have internationalized the situation which he has maintained is an internal matter. In these circumstances, he would be forced to deal with Mujib."

Kissinger: "Does anyone seriously believe India wants a reconciliation between East and West Pakistan?"

Sisco: "I believe India would be willing to go along if Mujib were restored to power by peaceful means. India doesn't want war. If Mujib were back in power, he would organize an East Pakistan government and it wouldn't be long before it was a separate entity or independent. However, Mujib, in a confederal tie with West Pakistan, would have as much fly-paper attraction for the West Bengalis as would an independent East Pakistan."

Kissinger: "You say that a chance of reconciliation exists more under Yahya than under Bhutto. Therefore, the four weeks before Yahya turns over to Bhutto must be used."

Sisco: "I say they could be used. If power is turned over to Bhutto, we will have more war in the subcontinent. The Indians have the upper hand – they will get East Pakistan one way or another. What are our interests? Maybe we can live with a war for three or four weeks. We won't become involved, and I don't think the Russians or Chinese will, either. But we don't want one power to dominate in the area, and the defeat of Pakistan would certainly strengthen the Soviet position."

Kissinger: "You say an opportunity exists to use Yahya to get a reconciliation. But we know that any reconciliation won't last since Mujib will go separatist in any event. We tell the Pakistanis 'let's have a reconciliation.' Then we tell the Indians 'why fight, since you are going to get it anyway.' Yahya may say 'if we're going to lose anyway, why me? Why not Bhutto?'"

Sisco: "Maybe it doesn't make any difference. If we stay out of it, the situation will evolve by military means rather than peaceful means."

Kissinger: "That's a phony. Everyone is for peaceful means, but do you honestly believe there is any chance of getting India to desist militarily? If the situation were reversed and the Pakistani troops were moving into India, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would be committing mass *hara-kari*, and there would be marches on Washington. When you say we should work for a peaceful settlement, are we going to help India grab what they want? Maybe we should, but don't say we have the choice of peace or war."

Sisco: "But India has the upper hand – they are stronger than Pakistan. I have not put this in terms of choosing."

Kissinger: "What do you recommend we do?"

Sisco: "We should do nothing for the moment."

Kissinger: "The president, the secretary of state and I have told the Indians there will be consequences if they start war."

Packard: "But what can we do? I don't see that we have any effective leverage on India."

Kissinger: "We can cut off aid. We can move diplomatically."

Packard: "Fine – we should, but with what likelihood of success? We don't know. One alternative would be to back up the Pakistanis, but we have to evaluate the chance of success and the price of failure."

Kissinger: "We don't have to back up the Pakistanis. It's not outrageous to ask that Yahya be given four weeks to try to adjust the political situation in East Pakistan. What is India doing other than pressing an attack on East Pakistan with a view to settling the hash of West Pakistan?"

Following the meeting, the Nixon administration intensified diplomatic efforts to avoid an all-out war. Through a secret channel, Kissinger told Farland that America would send a strong note to Gandhi for India's failure to respond to the U.S. proposal to withdraw troops from the border. Gandhi, before she went to Washington early November, told Heath that India had reservations. Washington also contacted Germany, asking Chancellor Willy Brandt to express his concern to India over the escalating tensions. In addition, Beam was asked to convey to the Russians, America's concern.

"We will continue to follow the situation very closely and you can assure Yahya that the president is personally involved in all aspects of the problem. Please keep me informed via this channel of any additional steps that you believe should be considered here," Kissinger told Farland.

The same day, Rogers summoned Pakistan's ambassador to urge Islamabad not to begin a war, noting he had earlier given the same message to India. The secretary said he had just returned from a long meeting with Nixon, who felt very strongly on the "need for maximum restraint," a message that apparently came a little too late. India's plan was obvious when the top Indian officials, including Gandhi and Swaran Singh, repeatedly dismissed America's proposal for a troop withdrawal, but Washington was so deeply engaged in its own strategy that it read little in it. Rasgotra, during his meeting with Rogers on 24 November, said he offered no suggestions when the secretary said America would take it seriously if war broke out. The Indian envoy admitted that India and Pakistan were giving two different versions of the situation, but defended New Delhi, saying it was India that informed America of the situation "as it saw it". Rasgotra denied the facts of an article published on 25 November in *The New York Times*, saying that reporter Sydney H. Schanberg had seen the Indian forces crossing borders into East Pakistan. He acknowledged that skirmishes had taken place but insisted that India had no interest in precipitating a war – a statement that Washington had, by then, no reason to accept at its face value.

## East Pakistan Burns, Yahya Snoozes

Although the noose was tightening around Pakistan, Yahya failed to fully appreciate the gravity of the situation even as late as November. In a weekly bulletin on 19 November the CIA said, “Despite the growing Mukti Bahini strength, it is doubtful that Islamabad yet feels under significant pressure to negotiate a settlement even approaching the rebels’ demand for immediate independence.”

Yahya, rather, proceeded with his version of the solution to the Bengali problem. He set for December the elections to the seats deemed vacated by certain members of the banned Awami League. He managed to convince seven parties to form a coalition that would dominate the National Assembly. Nurul Amin, a pro-Pakistani Bengali, headed the group. Such a government would have almost no support in East Pakistan, but the Americans concluded that the general had no other options. The CIA said: “Yahya would have difficulty in preserving his own position were he to deviate markedly from his established course.”

By that time, the U.S. intelligence had become convinced that the Bengalis would accept nothing short of total independence, even if their leaders hammered out a deal with Yahya. “Even should Yahya be able to open negotiations with the imprisoned Bengali leader, Mujibur Rahman would be repudiated by the guerrillas, if he were to settle for anything less than immediate and complete independence.”

This assessment mimicked a report on Yahya that Williams had given two weeks earlier, saying the military strongman was growing increasingly isolated from the events in the East. Williams had met Ghulam Ishaq Khan, the cabinet secretary, on 27 October. Khan believed the army’s reporting from East Pakistan had been misleading the president about the recent developments there.

Yahya’s growing isolation and the military’s misleading information had in fact been reported earlier by M. M. Ahmad, the general’s economic adviser. He said the Pakistan army in East Pakistan had gained nearly autonomous control of the province, working in many respects independent of Yahya’s policies and direction. Islamabad had firm control over only foreign affairs affecting East Pakistan. Yahya’s isolation was evident from several facts, Ahmad reported: First, the army commanders in the East pursued independent military operations. Second, the army governed the province behind the facade of puppet civilian Governor A.M. Malik and his cabinet, who relied completely on the army for their personal security. And, finally, Yahya lacked independent means of observation and verification of East Pakistan’s events.

Yahya, however, held a vastly different view of what was happening in East Pakistan. He had told the Americans on 28 October that his East Pakistan “civilianization” plan under Malik was succeeding in stabilizing the political situation. When elections had filled the vacated Awami League assembly seats, the “political accommodation” for a loyal provincial government in East Pakistan would have been completed. Yahya believed the political stability after elections would defeat India’s strategy of supporting the insurrection. Gandhi would then have nothing in hand to achieve her objectives except the recourse to war. The myth of East Pakistan’s growing political stability was fed to Yahya Khan by his civilian governor and army commanders who painted a grossly inaccurate picture of the actual situation.

The reality was that army policies and operations – behind the facade of a civilian government – were alienating the Bengalis. The seeds of rebellion were not only those sown by India. “The wide gap between the myth of growing stability as seen by Yahya Khan and the reality of political deterioration was most striking from comparing my recent visit to East Pakistan, [during] 21-26 October to observations made during the earlier August 19-25 trip,” Williams reported.

Although Yahya installed a puppet civilian governor, the province was run by the military. Major General Rao Farman Ali Khan was the army’s civil affairs specialist with ten years of service in the East. He sat in the Governor’s House and ran the province for the governor. Williams said, “My call on General Farman Ali Khan [on] 25 October interrupted a meeting with some ten of his military colleagues. They were, he said, selecting the men who would be elected in the next provincial elections.”

Farman Ali described the guerrilla insurgency level as “somewhat intensified but manageable” because the newly trained guerrillas entering from India feared to take action. Over 1400 guerrillas had entered the Dhaka district in the previous thirty days but only a few had chosen to fight. He acknowledged, off the record, that this was due to the terroristic reprisal policy. He also admitted that terror and reprisal had an “unfortunate effect on Bengali attitudes”. But, he said, “all army commanders had concluded that the insurgency was more of a problem in areas where the army had been too lenient and had not demonstrated cleanup operations.”

The Pakistani army, according to the Americans, was one of the most highly disciplined and professional infantry forces in the world. Despite orders from Islamabad not to engage in terrorist operations against the civilian population – and repeated assurances to the U.S. officials to this effect – the Pakistani army commanders continued terror raids, even within the environs of Dhaka and in sight of its large foreign community, Williams noted.

Farman Ali said the army would leave fighting the guerrillas to the newly armed Bengali “Rasikars,” numbering some 60,000. The Rasikars, raised at village levels for guard duty with only ten days’ training, did not constitute a disciplined force. However, they were a destabilizing element – living off the land, able to make life-and-death decisions by denouncing collaborators and openly pillaging and terrorizing villagers without restraint from the army. With the villagers caught between the Rasikars and the guerrillas, law and order broke down rapidly in rural East Pakistan. Hence, the rural population was moving either to the already overpopulated cities, or to India. The flow of Muslim refugees to India had recently increased – many of them small landholders and farmers, who were normally the more stable political elements.

Farman Ali estimated that at least eighty percent of East Pakistan’s Hindu community had left. Off the record, he spoke of about six million refugees who had gone to India. He anticipated another 1,500,000 would probably go “before the situation settles down”. One and a half million was a reasonable estimate of the number of Hindus still in East Pakistan.

With the army’s autonomous control from March 1971 of that year, Yahya’s hold over East Pakistan was limited to mainly foreign affairs, including managing relations with the US. Yahya took all the official American suggestions seriously and formulated them into major policy statements. It was “public-relations diplomacy”, so to speak. It was important, however, not to confuse the form with the substance. Elections, political accommodation and amnesty – all these were fine policy pronouncements. But their implementation remained with the army commanders

in East Pakistan, who were apparently immune from foreign influences.

Meanwhile, reports of continuing clashes along the Indo-Pak border reached Washington. Indian troops had attacked to silence the Pakistani artillery action. They might still be on the Pakistan side of the border, the American intelligence reported on 10 November, and the Pakistanis might be seriously considering a retaliatory attack.

Immediately, Sisco summoned both the Indian and Pakistani ambassadors to the State Department.

Major General Nawabzada Agha Mohammad Raza, who became Pakistani ambassador in Washington in November 1971, told Sisco that Pakistan had every intention to avoid beginning hostilities. Indian tactics were clear, however; i.e., to provoke Pakistan into steps that would give New Delhi an excuse to start war, he contended.

Sisco told Jha, "We are fearful that this kind of crossing would tempt and invite the Pakistani retaliatory action, and we, therefore, hope India would take some step to de-escalate the situation."

Jha asked if America had obtained independent confirmation of the reports in the press. Sisco replied that Washington was satisfied with their authenticity. Rasgotra, who accompanied Jha, countered that the Indian official spokesman had twice denied the reports, but the embassy had no further information.

On 15 November, Kissinger met with Sultan Khan, Pakistan's foreign secretary, in the White House. The national security adviser had a relaxed dinner the night before at the Pakistan ambassador's residence, along with Saunders. His conversation began with a background of the previous night's dinner discussion.

Kissinger first asked about the outcome of Khan's meeting with the secretary of state. Khan said Rogers was interested in learning how to start a political process involving Mujib within the limits that Yahya felt constrained him. He did not elaborate if a definite plan had been floated.

Apparently referring to his previous evening's conversation, Kissinger responded that because Farland would meet Yahya soon, he saw little need to seek a clarification on that point until he had heard from Islamabad. The other question that had come up was, what could he convey to the Russians?

Khan said that whatever was known to the Indians would also be known to the Soviets. He referred to a *Washington Post* article from New Delhi, based on a leak from the Indian side, that Yahya was willing to talk with the Awami League. The article said India must first approve of any such negotiations. He said India did not want to approve such negotiations, to begin with, and so the media leak was designed precisely to kill the idea. He felt that the determining factor would be what actually happened on the borders over the following week or so. He said Pakistan had exhausted the process of accepting suggestions. He listed those that Pakistan had accepted – from the offer for a unilateral military pullback through the willingness to negotiate with Bangladesh leaders. He did not see what else Pakistan could do, although Pakistan would always be receptive to U.S. suggestions.

Kissinger suggested that Pakistan could benefit from a comprehensive statement of everything it had done. The Indians had a monopoly of getting out the situation's one-sided picture. Presenting a clear picture that Pakistan had done its share could serve as a brake on the military action and a one-sided justification for it.

Khan said he wondered whether one statement could provide a brake for such a momentum. India had created a position for itself where one statement might be unable to do that. However, the one possible hope he saw was help from the Soviets in restraining the Indians.

Asking Sultan Khan and Raza not to repeat this to the State Department, Kissinger told them he had talked to the Soviet ambassador in the morning on other business. He had cautioned the Soviet ambassador that America took "the gravest view" of the South Asian situation. An outbreak of war there would not be understood in Washington. If the Soviets were thought to have engineered such a war, the US-Soviet relations would worsen.

Khan suggested the Soviet ambassador could be asked what Moscow saw wrong in supporting the U.S. proposal for a military pull-back. Kissinger replied he knew what the Indian answer would be – that Pakistan should first withdraw from the East Pakistan border. The foreign secretary said that would be fine if India were to pull back from that border and end its support for the guerrillas.

Kissinger said he would raise the point. He then returned to the issue of Mujib, saying that he was not pressing the foreign secretary at all but simply needed to understand Pakistan's position as clearly as possible. Kissinger asked whether he had understood Khan correctly the night before – that over a period of months Pakistan could show more flexibility towards Mujib.

Khan said, in the absence of instructions from Yahya, he could only say that once a civilian government was formed and if it failed to get the cooperation of the Bengalis, it would have to devise measures for improving that support. The government of that day would have to deal with this issue. If the provincial government said it was not getting the response from the people that was required, it would have to take this question up with the central government. He said he had to note that the feeling in the armed forces remained high against Mujib, so even a civilian government would have to weigh carefully any action taken in connection with Mujib.

Kissinger personally believed that whatever demand was met there would be another from the Indian side. The Indians had made Mujib central in their estimate of what it would take to resolve the situation. Kissinger said Mujib would "be devoured by the process" in Kolkata if he were released. But many people perceived him to be central to a solution, so it would be extremely helpful to have an authoritative statement from Yahya on Mujib over the next six months. He said he constantly confronted interpretations of Yahya's views, but he would prefer not to be "fighting a rear-guard action" for the general, without really knowing his views.

Khan replied that it would be important to know Yahya's views if the situation arose "where we might have some ideas on how to transform some aspects of the situation into a concrete proposal." He said it was extremely important to avoid telling the Indians of Pakistan's positions because they would leak them to embarrass Yahya.

Kissinger then took the foreign secretary in to see Nixon for seven or eight minutes. When they returned they agreed Khan would speak with Yahya and make his own personal assessment on Mujib, which would be sent via the backchannel to Kissinger, who noted the issue might be moot if India and Pakistan started war.

During the meeting, Nixon briefed Sultan Khan on his talks with Gandhi, assuring him "we talked very directly" with her. Regarding U.S. policy to deal with the crisis, Nixon said, "What we are trying desperately to do is not to allow this terrible tragedy, the agony that you're going through, [to] be a pretext to start a war." "The important thing," he added, "is we know, I know, that this is one of those terrible problems that, frankly,

must be solved by political solution, it must not be solved by force. We simply want to play a role that will be helpful. We will try to restrain to the extent that we have any influence with the Indians. We will do everything we can to try to help you in your cause. That's where we stand here. How, what we can do – what we can do, of course, is limited by the circumstances. We don't control the Indians. That's accurate. The fact that, if you, if there's any more – I would I'd like [sic] to give you more encouragement than this, but I'd like to be totally honest."

## India To Start War If Mujib Hanged

When Kissinger asked Cushman at the Washington Special Action Group meeting the next day about the South Asian situation, the CIA man said India and Pakistan had fought many clashes along their borders. Major hostilities could occur at any time with little warning. The guerrillas were increasingly effective in East Pakistan, controlling about thirty percent of the rural areas. Tensions had increased as the Indian border guards and army troops joined in the fighting between the Pakistan forces and the guerrillas. On the western front, both sides had made preparations in anticipation of war. The Soviet Union had done little to moderate India. China was unlikely to help Pakistan to a significant degree.

Speculating on what India's plan could be going forward, Sisco said Gandhi's speech in parliament on 15 November would give a clear sign if New Delhi intended to start war.

Kissinger: "Is it your judgment that war could come very quickly if she strikes the wrong note on Monday [15 November] with the parliament?"

Sisco: "If she decides to continue the pressure on Yahya, I think there is likely to be an intensification of the present situation. The Indian strategy has been to continue the pressure on Yahya and to suck Pakistan in militarily so that the principal onus for starting a war would fall on Pakistan. Any one incident where the Pakistanis retaliate can provide a *casus belli*."

Kissinger replied, "We will encourage a political evolution. But we will not support the Indian strategy to force the pace of such evolution so that West Pakistan can't survive." He then turned to Sisco and said, "When you started your movement toward Bangladesh, India immediately escalated their demands so that they were not possibly fulfillable in the existing framework."

Sisco: "India has had one demand – which they have made consistently and unchangingly – release Mujib, since he is the only man Yahya can negotiate with."

Kissinger disagreed: "No, they started by saying Yahya must talk to the Awami League leaders and he must not kill Mujib. Then when they got an agreement to that, they escalated to the position that Yahya must talk to Mujib."

Sisco said Gandhi seemed most interested in Yahya's possible willingness to consider meeting with a representative designated by Mujib.

Kissinger asked, "Do you think that is a real proposition? What is it that will deter India? I suppose we will know on Monday." He then added, "I could be wrong, but my instinct tells me that Yahya didn't consider this as a serious proposal but more as a last resort."

Sisco suggested reporting the results of Nixon's talks with Gandhi directly to Yahya. "We should tell him India seemed interested in the third alternative and ask how he feels about it."

Kissinger differed again, saying Gandhi "didn't indicate much interest in anything in her conversations with the president. She spent most of her time telling him that Baluchistan should never have been made a part of Pakistan. When he asked her about the military withdrawal, she said she would let him know the next day, and she didn't even have the courtesy to mention it again."

Kissinger then asked, what should Washington do if war broke out?

Sisco proposed getting a U.N. resolution passed to "seek some sort of restraining order. I am under no illusion about the practical effect of such a resolution or that it will be an easy exercise. But I think it is important that we go public before the balloon goes up. After it blows up, we will be in the Security Council anyhow to get a ceasefire. With this in mind, I'd like to preposition a few things. We have started drafting a resolution and a scenario for a move into the council. This would, of course, be the first test of the Chinese communists, and I would expect them to be helpful. Of course, this puts the Soviets in a helluva position. They would be confronted in the council with the same reality as we are. I would see this as a preempting move."

Kissinger: "What would the resolution say?"

Sisco: "It would call on both sides to refrain from further activity to exacerbate the situation. We would have to weigh very carefully whether we wanted to call for everyone to stop shooting. A ceasefire would be very complicated. The issue between India and Pakistan would be easy, but we have the argument that what is going on in East Pakistan is a liberating movement, so we would have to be very careful. But I think it would be important to air the issue, bring out the facts, get some speeches and get the council to say everyone should keep their shirts on."

Kissinger: "What would be the operational significance of a U.N. resolution?"

Sisco: "I don't overestimate the significance. Of course, it can't prevent war."

Kissinger: "What about timing? At what point would we say we have made all the moves?"

Sisco: "That could come later."

Kissinger: "A Security Council resolution doesn't do a damned thing. What could it do?"

Sisco: "It would draw the world attention to the situation, expose the facts, including what is happening militarily, and clarify where the responsibility lies."

Kissinger: "Both sides would claim the other side has made the first move. The Pakistanis aren't so stupid as to challenge India militarily now. If war starts, it would have to be by India."

Sisco: "Any restraining order would obviously be pointed more toward India."

Kissinger: "What if the Indians say they can't control the situation – that only the Pakistanis can control it? Wouldn't this give them another excuse to go to war to defend the U.N. resolution?"

Sisco: "A restraining order wouldn't reinforce India's justification for going to war."

Kissinger: "But India will say their troops aren't doing anything and that it is the Pakistanis who aren't obeying the ceasefire."

Sisco: "I don't overestimate the practical effect of a U.N. resolution, but what is the alternative?"

Kissinger maintained that if Gandhi "wanted a way out, we should try to give it to her. But we have broken our backs to help her and what has

she done? She hasn't accepted one thing we've offered. She has said friendly things about the president, but they were not related to what he said. She's merely trying to jockey us into a position as the villain of the peace. The question is how are we restraining her by giving her two-thirds of what she wants and letting her use that as a basis for the next move? We should just say that the use of force is not justified."

Sisco said Washington would make it clear in the council that the Indians had refused every offer.

Kissinger: "Would you want to go into the council by next Tuesday [16 November 1971] – the timing makes a difference. Would you see the debate as being on military intervention or on political atrocities?"

Sisco: "The debate would have to cover both."

Turning to Cushman, Kissinger asked: "What do you think?"

Cushman: "We think there is a good chance that these acts are designed to provoke war. They may, however, be to assist the guerrillas so that they can solve the problem themselves. Things might become clearer after Gandhi's speech before parliament on 15 November.

The discussion then turned to how Pakistan would act. General John Ryan, the Air Force chief, asked what assurance America had that the Pakistanis would not preempt the situation and move against the Indians.

Kissinger: "If they will lose East Pakistan politically anyhow, why not lose in a war?"

When Sisco remarked that if there was a war, "we will have to come to an understanding on the non-involvement of the major powers," Kissinger responded: "India doesn't need to involve anyone else to beat the Paks."

Sisco did not think the big-power involvement was likely. "The Russians will drag their feet if India is winning and if they have made up their minds to shear off East Pakistan. If war starts, there is no question but that the Indians have the preponderant strength."

Kissinger: "In the West as well as the East?"

Ryan: "In the West, too. The Paks are outnumbered three to one. The Indians have better air equipment, too."

Sisco: "The Paks are no match, and Yahya knows it."

By mid-November, Kissinger had realized he needed a clearer picture of the situation to decide the future course of action. He sent a "backchannel message" to Farland on 15 November.

"The president would appreciate it if you could give us in this channel your personal assessment of the situation in South Asia," Kissinger wrote to Farland. "We are receiving conflicting views as to the situation and how it is perceived by Yahya Khan. Some say he is desperate and cannot continue for long to control the situation and, therefore, he would welcome our pressing him to a political solution. Others doubt this view."

Kissinger noted that the State Department thought Yahya was serious about talking with anyone chosen by Mujib. "Is this assessment accurate in your judgment?" he asked Farland.

Farland had reported to the State Department his conversation with Yahya on 2 November. Yahya had said he did not view the Awami League as a "nefarious institution". If purged of its "secessionist leaders", he saw "no obstacle to its revalidation by the forthcoming civilian government". Yahya was willing to engage in substantive discussions with the Bangladesh representatives who were in a position to act constructively.

When Williams returned to Washington from East Pakistan, he gave a damning report on Yahya's grip on the situation in East Pakistan. When Kissinger briefed Nixon on Pakistan, based on information provided by Williams on 16 November, he told Nixon the Pakistani army was "nearly autonomous" in its operations in East Pakistan, "with Yahya having only decreasing control over his government's policy in East Pakistan".

"Two key advisers to President Yahya told Williams that Yahya is increasingly isolated from events in East Pakistan," Kissinger added. "The recently appointed civilian government is really run by a major general who is the military adviser to the governor."

Kissinger noted that reprisal operations continued to focus against Hindus. "These observations suggest that it may be time to add a new chapter in our strategy toward Pakistan. The strategy laid out in August for trying to reduce the flow of refugees by humanitarian assistance has worked to the extent that we have helped stave off a major famine and, therefore, a major new flood of refugees. That strategy has revealed, however, that the current level of refugees stems not from hunger but from a continuing deterioration of law and order as the rural population is caught between the guerrillas and the army along with its local allies."

If Yahya's own electoral process and the practices of his army would not win wide enough support to defuse the guerrilla campaign, the question then would arise what other political steps he might take to establish a viable political alternative to the guerrilla's demand for independence. "Unless he can devise such steps, he may face the prospect of losing East Pakistan in a war, which could have repercussions for the integrity of West Pakistan as well," Kissinger told Nixon.

On 18 November Farland replied to Kissinger that Yahya was not interested in discussing a political settlement with Mujib's designee, but continued to be interested in talks. Yahya said he would grant "white flag" passage to and from West Pakistan, but would not meet with a Bangladesh representative who had been judged guilty of a major crime.

Farland said Yahya was determined to go ahead with his own plan for a "political solution", a plan that clearly displayed how detached from reality Yahya had become. He believed he had a viable plan, which called for convening parliament on 27 December and transferring power to a civilian government within two weeks thereafter. Little did he know he would not be in the President House till 27 December.

"He gave me the impression he was zealously anxious to extricate himself from a deteriorating situation by stepping down, thus accomplishing his prime objective, i.e., the transfer of power. From our conversation, I seriously question if he will deviate from what he has as his blueprint."

Yahya's ineffectiveness to pull the province out of its predicament by military action had become clear to the Americans by the end of November. They had also realized – albeit very belatedly – that they might need to shove rather than push to get the Pakistani military ruler into action to yield desired results. But Washington apparently failed to grasp how little precious time it had left to make its moves to dissuade India from military action that New Delhi was about to embark upon. This handicap suggested the Nixon administration's poor understanding of New Delhi, despite reportedly having intelligence sources in top places in the Indian capital.

## Agha Khan Formula: Unique Solution Missed?

**T**ill November end, America had expected to resolve East Pakistan's crisis through dialogue. The Americans kept nurturing this idea based on assessments from several sources, including top U.N. officials.

One such official was Prince Sadruddin Agha Khan, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. Upon his return from a trip to New Delhi and Islamabad, he offered what was termed as a realistic and practical solution to the impasse. On 23 November, he told Sisco the only way out was a Mujib-Yahya talk. Sadruddin said India wanted to avoid war and would accept whatever solution the Awami League accepted. If Gandhi returned from the foreign tour with some kind of assurance that other governments would put pressure on Pakistan, she could use this argument to counter hawks who demanded recognition of Bangladesh and all-out war. From his conversation with Dhar, Sadruddin had sensed the Bangladesh leaders were splitting into factions and getting out of India's control. Dhar could no longer guarantee to Gandhi that the Bengalis would follow the Indian line.

The U.N. official reported that India's leaders pressed him to work for a political solution in Islamabad. India had taken great pains to make sure his visit was not exploited in the Indian press and to ensure that he would go to Islamabad with a clean slate. Sadruddin noted that in his field trips to Assam and Meghalaya, he was very much aware of the rising communal and tribal tensions. He thought the recent Jessore operation was to test India's ability to use the Mukti Bahini with India's support to put pressure on Yahya.

Sadruddin had told Rogers and Sisco on 24 June that unless a quick political solution was found, South Asia could be the new Vietnam. The Bengalis and the Punjabis were polarized, with no sympathy between them. Extremists in East Pakistan – the Naxalites – were using fear against a “foreign army” to strengthen themselves, which could result in an extended guerrilla warfare. India was quite worried about this. Gandhi's inner cabinet had decided not to recognize Bangladesh, not to go to war with Pakistan but to support the “Mukhti Fauj”. Thus India opposed the proposal for U.N. presence on the East Pakistan border. India sought international relief but did not wish to have foreigners wandering about the border areas. Sadruddin said some East Pakistanis would return if they had an element of guarantee. The others would return with simply a return to peace in East Pakistan, if only because of the “continuous squalor” of the Indian refugee camps.

He faulted India for the “inconsistency” of its policy. On the one hand, India complained about the presence of six million refugees and insisted they must return; on the other hand, it imposed conditions for their return, such as negotiations with Mujib. He said India was not following a logical and pragmatic path. He said India seemed uninterested in repatriation. It was important that India not insist upon political solution as a prior condition for the return of the refugees. By political solution, India apparently meant Mujib's return.

Quoting Yahya, Sadruddin said that those elected members of Awami League who were not “criminals” should come forward and lead the people of East Pakistan so that he could hand over power to them. He intended to announce a Turkish-type of constitution providing for substantial army control. But Sadruddin feared that it would not be enough; he should withdraw the army. Yet he could not do so in the border areas so long as India supported infiltration. He favored keeping up the pressure on India to moderate its position on refugee return; control Bangladesh elements and stop infiltration.

Sadruddin said that when he met with Gandhi, she was very “hawkish.” She sought to impress him with the seriousness of the situation, saying “we may have to resort to other means.”

Rogers said Swaran Singh had also used the terms “special measures” or “another option” when he was in Washington. Rogers had replied that if he meant military means, “we thought this would be a very great mistake. Swaran Singh then backed away from this implication.”

Sisco told Sadruddin the United States had indicated its willingness to continue to support the refugees financially and conveyed a new proposal to India for the withdrawal of forces that would allow Yahya to take the first step if India would reciprocate. He also mentioned that Washington had told Gandhi that Yahya was willing to talk to the cleared Awami Leaguers and Bangladesh representatives based in Kolkata.

“We stressed the importance of starting the process of dialogue. We recognized that a political accommodation could not take place without Mujib. We also recognized that the crucial proposal was in the area of political accommodation and that it fell short of the Indian position. We think Mrs Gandhi felt we gave her something which enabled her to adopt a restrained position on her return,” Sisco said, giving an incorrect reading of the Indian prime minister's mind.

Commenting on the military situation, Sisco said information was hard to come by, but substantial fighting was involved at the division and brigade level. Activity was a mixture of the Mukti Bahini and Indian forces, including tanks, artillery and airplanes. It put the Pakistanis in a difficult position, since they were weaker than the Indians. If they reacted in the West, it would enable India to place the onus for starting the war on Pakistan's head.

Sisco asked for Sadruddin's view of the Security Council action. Sadruddin said it might be a good idea since it would open up the East Pakistan problem for international discussion. The debate would go into the Indo-Pak problem as well as the root cause. He said he thought it was a great shame that the United Nations had to wait until war broke out before tackling problems in the Security Council.

Sisco noted the Security Council meeting might lead to a restraining order, which could be a form of pressure for a political change in Pakistan as well. Sadruddin said India might welcome the Security Council action, particularly if it felt that an all-out war with Pakistan would not pay.

Sisco wondered whether the Mukti Bahini victory, in which an East Pakistan regime friendly to India came to power, would not be in India's interest. Sadruddin said the situation would get out of hand and the Indians would be unable to control the situation – a statement that mimicked the line profoundly believed in Washington.

Sadruddin said it was his assessment that Mujib might not want an independent Bangladesh. His assessment was based on long meetings he has had with A.K. Brohi, Mujib's defense counsel. Although Yahya claimed he could not deal with Mujib because the Bengali leader would be killed



by his own people, Sadrudin said he thought Yahya was completely wrong. Only Bhutto and a few generals would really oppose. He saw a danger that Yahya would accede to Bhutto's demand and transfer power to him. If the power was transferred to Bhutto in the West wing and to "stooges" in the East, Yahya would be unable to establish his credibility and the prospect for a unified country would be over.

The Mukti Bahini would fight forever with India's support against a puppet government in Dhaka. Sadrudin said he had pleaded with Yahya for many hours to establish his credibility, not by the transfer of power but by starting a dialogue with Mujib. Yahya argued there would be tremendous unrest in West Pakistan. Sadrudin thought Yahya was definitely exaggerating the possible reaction.

Sadrudin suggested a scenario that might defuse the situation. The first step was for Yahya to show to the Indians and to the rest of the world that Mujib was alive, and begin a dialogue with him. He must also make sure, perhaps with Chinese and American support, that Bhutto remained quiet and would not disrupt any negotiations. Simultaneously, India's friends would put pressure on New Delhi to defuse the border situation, while actual negotiations with Mujib got under way.

Sadrudin noted that Dhar had told him if there were indications of the slightest progress in a dialogue with Mujib, the situation would be immediately improved and India might even accept the U.N. secretary general's good offices or the world organization's presence. Sadrudin emphasized that Yahya must ensure that the army recognized that there could be no military solution in East Pakistan and that it must accept a political solution instead.

Sisco asked whether Mujib could, in fact, settle for substantial autonomy or a confederal link between East and West Pakistan. Sadrudin said he was convinced that Mujib would go along. Yahya was also convinced, but felt that the army would not accept the end to its privileges in Pakistan. Yahya's trump card would be for Brohi to prove that Mujib was innocent. Then he could be rehabilitated as in the aftermath of the Agartala conspiracy trial, a sedition case brought in early 1968 by the Pakistan government against Sheikh Mujib and thirty-four other military and civilian Bengali officers. The case was ultimately withdrawn in the face of a massive popular uprising and the accused were released amidst a popular uprising, which eventually led to President Ayub Khan's downfall.

Sadrudin said Yahya had begun to realize that the military solution was impossible. Yahya's solution, however, was to put pressure on Gandhi to give up support of the Mukti Bahini. He believed he could then clean up the Mukti Bahini in a matter of days and transfer power to the elected representatives. This was unrealistic, he said. Sadrudin was prepared to make any effort to resolve the Pakistani crisis but he did not think he could succeed, where even China and the United States had failed, to convince Yahya to alter his course. Sadrudin had suggested to Nixon that he send a personal message proposing that Yahya establish contact with Mujib and publicly show that he was alive.

Sadrudin's idea, however innovative, came a little too late. Washington realized that India and Pakistan were already on the road to war. As India and Pakistan started drifting towards a direct clash, Washington sought Russia's help to prevent a full-scale war. On 23 November, the State Department asked the U.S. ambassador in Moscow to see Gromyko to express America's concern about the dangers ahead. The message that Beam was to convey read in part: "At this critical juncture we hope the U.S.S.R. will make renewed efforts to restrain India and will not further encourage Indian military actions against East Pakistan by further deliveries of military equipment."

Gromyko was unavailable to meet with Beam because of the Supreme Soviet session, and the ambassador had to meet instead with First Deputy Foreign Minister V.V. Kuznetsov to make a presentation as specified by Washington. He emphasized that he was acting under instructions from his government, which was concerned at the growing danger of war.

Kuznetsov interrupted Beam once to ask the source of America's information concerning the military actions in East Pakistan. Beam said the information is gathered from America's current intelligence from that area.

Kuznetsov said that in recent days the Soviet government had approached both New Delhi and Islamabad with appeals that they exhibit wisdom and patience and not take steps that could worsen the situation and lead to war. Gandhi had again said India did not intend to unleash war, but reiterated the need for urgent Pakistani measures for a political settlement. On the military situation, Kuznetsov noted that the Soviet information was confusing. However, the Soviets had received reports from New Delhi concerning apparent Pakistani efforts to provoke a military conflict.

While this information was less than fully reliable, the apparent downing of three Pakistani planes over Indian airspace and the capture of two Pakistani pilots, if confirmed, suggested Pakistan was guilty of violating India's airspace. Kuznetsov said the situation in general seemed to be worsening and the Soviets were preparing to make new approaches in both New Delhi and Islamabad. He said the Pakistani authorities were still not taking necessary measures for a political settlement. For example, Mujib's release would help negotiations with the Awami League. The Soviets stressed this point in their approach to Yahya.

When Beam asked how Islamabad had responded thus far to the Soviet approaches, Kuznetsov said Yahya had promised not to launch military actions but had tried to blame the Indians. He had said nothing definite on the key question of a political settlement.

In general, Kuznetsov said the situation was extremely complicated. It was difficult to find out what was going on and which side was initiating military action. He asked if Washington had any new suggestions.

Beam replied he had no formula for a solution, but felt the Indians were supporting the insurgents, which amounted to hostile act against Pakistan.

Kuznetsov reiterated his earlier view that Pakistan was responsible for the present situation. He hoped that America would persuade Pakistan to see that the main step leading to East Pakistan's normalization would be the speediest possible implementation of political arrangements, taking into account the Bengali will as expressed in the 1970 elections.

On 24 November Nixon, Rogers and Kissinger met in the Oval Office at 12:30 p.m. to discuss the expanding East Pakistan conflict. Starting off the conversation, Rogers denied that there was any difference in perspective on South Asia between the White House and the State Department – an allegation Nixon often made against the American foreign service officials. Rogers then offered his assessment of how the United States should respond to the crisis.

"First, it seems to me we should engage in the maximum diplomatic efforts to do everything we can to caution restraint on both sides at the highest level always so that everyone can look at the record and see that we have done everything that we can diplomatically. Secondly, I think that our relations with Yahya are good and should continue to be good and we should continue to keep very close to him. Three, I don't think we should try to mastermind a political solution. I never thought so. I don't think it is possible and I think he [Yahya] is coming to the conclusion that something has to be done politically."

Nixon referred to the news reports on the fighting in East Pakistan and asked if the Indians were still denying that they had army divisions fighting there. Rogers said that they were indeed denying it, and that while they did not have divisions involved, India was in East Pakistan in the brigade strength of 5000 soldiers.

Kissinger noted that the Indian brigades were supported by artillery, air and armor.

Rogers guessed that India would "get more involved" in the fighting in East Pakistan and that Pakistan's position would progressively deteriorate. "I think we have to face the fact that Yahya's position militarily is extremely weak. He's got 60,000-80,000 men in East Pakistan."

Nixon predicted, "He'll be demolished there."

Rogers pointed to the logistical problems confronted by Pakistan. "It is a 2,500 mile flight to resupply the troops in East Pakistan. Our ability to affect the course of events is quite limited."

Referring to Rogers' observation that the moves being taken by the United States appeared to be limited to symbolic gestures in attempting to restrain India, Nixon said, "I know it can be said that it won't do any good, and we don't have any leverage, and it's only symbolic and the rest. But on the other hand, I want you to look into what we could do that is symbolic because I think we need some symbolism."

He said he recognized the realities of the situation: "Looking at the balance there, the Indians are going to win . . . Pakistan will disintegrate." It was, therefore, "very much in our interest to get the damned thing cooled, if we can. . . . Under those circumstances, it seems to me that, clearly apart from the fact that Yahya has been more decent to us than she (Gandhi) has, clearly apart from that, I think that our policy wherever we can should definitely be tilted toward Pakistan, and not toward India. I think India is more at fault."

Rogers felt that if the issue was taken up by the United Nations, "Pakistan will come off better than India." He "agreed fully" that the United States should tilt toward Pakistan; the question, he said, was how to do it. He outlined several possibilities, which included cutting off military and economic aid.

Kissinger gave an interpretation of India's objectives in the crisis. He saw India as striving to split Pakistan, with West Pakistan ultimately reduced to the status of Afghanistan, and East Pakistan, of Bhutan – a reference to two of South Asia's relatively weaker nations in terms of military might.

Rogers, however, viewed the conflict as growing out of the deeply ingrained sectarian animosity that had animated the initial division of the subcontinent. Both Rogers and Kissinger agreed with Nixon's assessment of Yahya Khan as a "decent and reasonable man", if "not always smart politically". All the three viewed with trepidation the prospect of Yahya stepping aside in favor of Bhutto. Nixon called Bhutto "a total demagogue". In a concluding admonition to Rogers and Kissinger, Nixon said, "I don't want to get caught in the business where we take the heat for a miserable war that we had nothing to do with."

On 25 November, Rogers summoned Rasgotra, India's chargé in Washington. Referring to the conflicting reports of India's troops entering East Pakistan, he said, "We would like impartial observers to find out what was happening." He then asked whether Rasgotra had any ideas how this might be done. The Indian envoy, who operated from a habit of taking in more than giving out, simply said he had none.

When Rogers suggested that the Indian and Pakistani forces be withdrawn and separated a distance, so that neither side could take advantage of the situation, Rasgotra said he would pass on the message to New Delhi.

When Sisco said Gandhi had not responded to the U.S. proposal for discussions between the Bangladesh leaders and Pakistan, Rasgotra said India would have to get the Bangladesh reaction, but there had been no reaction till then. Rasgotra did not know whether India could accept the withdrawal proposal.

Rogers said it would be difficult for the Americans to understand how India could say it did not want hostilities and yet would not disengage because it did not know the terms of disengagement.

Rasgotra noted that even if India withdrew, it would still leave the basic situation in East Pakistan unchanged. He asked whether there had been any change in the Pakistani attitude towards the use of the military in East Pakistan.

Sisco commented that there had been none, but Pakistan claimed that as long as the Mukti Bahini, supported by the Indian troops, was active in East Pakistan it would not be possible to reduce military actions.

While Sisco talked with Rasgotra, Kissinger received a cable from Keating on a conversation the ambassador had with the Indian foreign minister. On 25 November, Kissinger summed up for Nixon what Swaran Singh had said in New Delhi during what Keating called a "rambling two-hour" talk. Singh said that "even now, it is not too late for President Yahya to make a dramatic political gesture. The situation would be immediately defused by such a gesture. This should involve negotiations with East Pakistan's elected representatives and not going ahead with his farce of elections."

Singh thought Yahya could still free Mujib and start talks – if not overnight, perhaps in two or three weeks. Singh's statement was apparently a camouflage to divert America's attention from India's secret military plan that envisioned the likelihood of waging a full-scale war in a matter of days.

If Pakistan withdrew its troops from the border, Kissinger said, then another situation would arise and India would certainly consider that situation. However, Yahya was only prepared to withdraw contingent on India's reciprocal pullback.

Kissinger also told Nixon that India's high commissioner in Pakistan, J.K. Atal, had returned to Islamabad from high-level consultations in New Delhi, "carrying an important message". An old friend of Yahya's, Atal had gone to New Delhi after a long conversation with Yahya a week earlier. He was reportedly impressed with Yahya's plan to turn over his government to civilian leaders. Atal went to New Delhi to urge Gandhi to give a chance to Yahya's political timetable. He was back in Islamabad and was scheduled to see Sultan Khan. But the United States had no idea about the outcome of Atal's talks in New Delhi.

On 27 November, Farland informed Washington about a conversation he had with Atal, who indicated he would try to promote a rapprochement between India and Pakistan. His idea was to promote a meeting between the Awami League and Yahya's representatives. He considered Mujib no longer important and his release, not a necessary precondition to such a dialogue. Farland passed along Atal's suggestion to Yahya. Yahya remarked that Atal's suggestion differed so much from his government's position, particularly about Mujib, that it must reflect that the high commissioner was inadequately briefed before he took up his position in Pakistan.

Why Atal made remarks sharply differently from New Delhi's position stirred up a debate in Washington. When the Washington Special Action

Group met on 29 November Kissinger asked Cushman, "Do you think the Indian high commissioner in Islamabad acted on his own in his meeting with Yahya?"

Cushman said it was a very puzzling situation, indeed. In a latter conversation at a party with Farland, Atal did not seem to know what messages he had sent to New Delhi or where the game stood. There were indications that he and Kaul did not see eye-to-eye, but he certainly was not transmitting the same message as New Delhi.

Cushman's comments confused Kissinger. He wanted to make sure what Cushman meant: "Did I understand that he didn't know the content of the messages he was sending to New Delhi or of the messages he was receiving from New Delhi?"

Cushman clarified: "The messages he had sent to New Delhi."

Kissinger: "Hasn't he just come from New Delhi?"

Cushman: "Yes."

On the military front, Cushman reported there had been no dramatic change in the situation in East Pakistan since November 24. India had seven divisions massed along the border with East Pakistan, but most of the fighting within East Pakistan was being done by the Mukti Bahini, supported by the Indian artillery, armor and, on occasion, troops.

Kissinger then turned to Moorer, Joint Chiefs chairman: "What are your views on the military side?"

Moorer: "Our intelligence is about the same. We did have a report of a remark by Yahya at a party to the effect that 'You won't see me for a day or two – I am going to the border to lead war operations.' The logistic situation is such that the Pakistan forces in East Pakistan will run out of supplies – mainly ammunition – in a short time, and Yahya may be forced to move in the West. Certainly, the situation is more critical than it was last week."

Kissinger then sought a rundown on the diplomatic moves.

Sisco said he believed India had every intention of continuing its present military posture to serve its political objectives.

Kissinger asked: "Do you think this campaign was planned before the Gandhi trip?"

Sisco: "Militarily, yes. There had already been some deployments. But the most active military moves were made post-Washington."

Moorer: "They obviously had a contingency plan."

Kissinger: "I'm asking this for my own education. We have been debating all summer whether or not the Indians were being restrained. If they had been planning this all along, would this have been the earliest they could attack, given the time needed for deployment and the advent of the rainy season? If the decision had been made last June, what would have been the earliest time they could have attacked?"

Moorer: "Four or five weeks."

Williams: "It was timed to the requirement for the training of the Bengalis."

Kissinger: "I'm not trying to put words in people's mouths. But one could argue that everything the Indians have done since June has been designed to prepare for this, and that the trips by Foreign Secretary Singh and Mrs. Gandhi were smoke-screens. Or, one could say that the Indians have been making a serious effort to solve the problem and that they finally moved out of desperation."

Moorer: "I think the readiness of the Bengalis dictated the timing. The Indians could have moved earlier with their regular forces. What is happening is that the guerrillas are backing up against the Indians, who then are giving them artillery and other support. The Indian objective is to change the relative strength of the Pakistanis and the guerrillas."

Kissinger then asked Williams for his views.

Williams said, "I think the Indians might have moved two or three weeks earlier, allowing for time to train the Bengalis and for the monsoon. They did have a margin of about three weeks before they invaded, which coincided with Mrs. Gandhi's trip. I think they waited for her to return."

Moorer: "They have obviously been training and supplying the guerrillas."

Williams: "I think they had hoped the guerrillas would be more effective in their internal operations than they were. They found, however, that the guerrillas were only effective when stiffened by the Indians, which was their second strategy. They would have preferred that it be done internally, strictly by the Mukti Bahini."

David Packard, deputy defense secretary, said it looked as though India had been moving right ahead, taking advantage of the situation as it developed.

Kissinger remarked that India did not exploit the possible opening of talks between Yahya and the Bengalis, which Sisco worked on in the summer. That could have been the beginning. If Bangladesh had asked for Mujib's release in those talks, there might have been some movement and the situation might have been stabilized.

On 29 November, Kissinger informed Nixon that active fighting continued in East Pakistan. The Indian officials seemed increasingly open about the fact that the Indian troops had crossed into East Pakistan, but maintained they did so to quell Pakistani shelling. The Pakistani army in East Pakistan, the Americans estimated, could defend the province for a month and limit Indian penetrations to ten or fifteen miles, if India avoided using air power.

To get a better grip on the situation, Kissinger sent a telegram to Farland on 30 November asking the ambassador to comment on reports that Pakistan might attack Kashmir to relieve pressure upon East Pakistan.

"We have no information here to suggest that a Pakistani attack on Kashmir is imminent or under active consideration, although some contingency plan to that effect surely exists," Farland replied. "Yahya continues to assure me that he does not wish war, nor does he intend to start it here. He has so far held sway over his hawks, although how much longer he can do so in the face of continued Indian incursions into East Pakistan is most uncertain. The Pakistanis are in a state of readiness and if they do finally conclude they must fight in the West as well as in the East, Kashmir is an emotionally attractive target, although we have generally thought that they would go for the more easily penetrated areas further south."

## India Begins Blitzkrieg

Faced with a potentially explosive situation in South Asia, on 1 December Nixon sent a letter to Gandhi, which Keating delivered to the Indian premier. She read it and promised the American ambassador she would reply promptly, adding that every country must first look to its national interest and it was her duty to see what was in her country's own.

Speaking on the East Pakistan crisis, the prime minister blamed Yahya for creating his problems and insisted that he must face the consequences of his action. "We are not in a position to make this easier for him," Gandhi said, adding that India was being asked to allow Yahya's misdeeds to stand, but "we are not going to allow that."

No one in India opposed war more than she did, Gandhi declared. "I wouldn't like to take this country to war," but "this war and this situation are not of our making."

In an indirect jab at the United States, she noted that many countries said they were exerting pressure on Yahya, but "what has it yielded?" Nothing, she herself answered, except that "Yahya had his back to the wall" and wanted "to be bailed out". Then she commented, "We have to take steps which will make us stronger to deal with this situation."

Gandhi said Yahya's step to start a political process, especially what she called the "farical" elections, had moved the situation in the wrong direction. These so-called elections were "not going to make any difference whatsoever".

When Keating commented that her position was very firm, Gandhi replied that things had become a little harder than before. She said her own patience had worn thin, and she did not know how to tell India to continue to wait. "I can't hold it."

When Keating started to comment about the recent Indian military incursions, she cut him off. "We can't afford to listen to advice which weakens us."

Following his conversation with Gandhi, Keating informed Washington: "In the absence of some major development toward a meaningful political accommodation, India will assure that the efforts of the Mukti Bahini to liberate East Pakistan do not fail."

The day Keating met with Gandhi, the United States decided to cut off military aid to India, as Nixon had threatened many times since the crisis erupted, to punish New Delhi. Nixon held India responsible for the trouble in South Asia.

Sisco informed Rasgotra of America's new aid policy. The Indian envoy regretted the decision. He said India would note the alacrity with which the United States cut off its military sales to India, compared to the delays involved in the similar cut-off to Pakistan.

In New Delhi, the aid cut-off did not create much of a wrinkle. Keating reported to Washington that when he informed Kaul of the new U.S. military supply policy, the foreign secretary "took the news well, but said that pressure tactics would not succeed in dissuading India from the path on which it was embarked."

America's decision to cut off aid followed concerns in Washington that India was embarked on a mission not just to partition Pakistan, but also ensure its complete disintegration. When the Washington Special Action Group met on 1 December, Kissinger asked whether Gandhi would "allow the Pakistanis to stay in West Pakistan for the time being." His statement alluded that India wanted to destroy West Pakistan as well. But before anyone could answer, Kissinger was called from the meeting room.

When the group resumed discussion in Kissinger's absence, Irwin asked if the war would be over in a month. Both Cushman and Moorer said, "Yes." Moorer said the Pakistan army in East Pakistan had begun to ration ammunition – ten rounds per tube. "They're beginning to feel the squeeze."

When Kissinger re-joined the meeting, he cited some media reports that were critical of the administration. "Some of the papers are saying we're not doing our arithmetic – that we're losing 500 million Indians for 150 million Pakistanis. I don't know what we're losing in India and, in any event, that's not the purpose of our policy."

He then asked: "How long do you think Pakistan can hold out?"

Moorer replied, "Two or three weeks."

The next day, Kissinger told Nixon that Indian and guerrilla offensive was gaining momentum, with the insurgents operating more freely. They had captured some towns as close as seventeen miles from Dhaka, and the Bangladesh flag was flying in several towns in the interior.

## Yahya Appeals For Nixon's Help

Yahya made an appeal to Nixon on 2 December to make India stop the war. "India has chosen the path of war, aided and abetted by Soviet Union, in a bid to break up my country. Time is fast running out and the choice before me has, indeed, become very limited."

He said the U.S. actions announced so far had failed to deter India. Yahya urged Nixon to issue a personal statement "condemning India's aggression, aided and abetted by the Soviet Union, and calling for an immediate end to hostilities and withdrawal of opposing forces to a safe distance behind their respective borders." He asked Nixon to advise the Soviet Union to "desist from militarily supporting India".

To win military aid from the United States, Yahya invoked the Pakistan-United States Bilateral Agreement of Co-operation Pact of 1959. Under the pact, Pakistan claimed, the United States had an obligation to come to its aid; Washington disagreed with Pakistan's interpretation of what the agreement implied.

"I shall be most anxiously awaiting your reply," Yahya told Nixon.

The administration discussed whether America ever agreed to provide military aid to Pakistan under the pact in the event of an attack by a third country. Kissinger said a secret clause provided such assurances, but State and Pentagon officials disagreed. Van Hollen said the assurance was

given in the context of America's assurance to India when China moved, and were no longer in effect.

On 4 December, Kissinger called Nixon to tell the president, "We have had an urgent appeal from Yahya." Yahya was asking whether the United States would send military supplies through Iran.

Nixon asked: "Can we help?"

Kissinger replied: "I think if we tell the Iranians we will make it up to them we can do it."

Nixon concurred: "If it is leaking, we can have it denied. Have it done one step away."

On instructions from Washington, the Shah indicated that he would be glad to help. But he stipulated that the United States quickly replace what was transferred. On the same day in Amman, King Hussein showed U.S. Ambassador Dean Brown a telegram from Yahya asking for military assistance. Hussein said Pakistan wanted eight to ten Jordanian F-104 fighters. Since the United States had provided the aircraft, Hussein turned to the embassy for advice.

America gave the go-ahead to both Iran and Jordan. Rogers told Keating neither to confirm nor deny that the United States endorsed Jordanian and Iranian transfer of American arms to Pakistan. But the U.S. Embassy in Iran reported to the State Department on 29 December that three F-5A Fighter aircraft, reportedly from the United States, had been flown to Pakistan. A Northrop official matched the aircraft to a group of planes originally slated for sale to Libya, but were later placed under the U.S. government control in California after a dispute with Tripoli.

Later, in 1972, Kissinger would admit during a conversation with Chinese premier Chou En-lai that the United States had illegally supplied arms to Pakistan via third countries during the Bangladesh war.

"We have been prevented by the Democratic Congress from giving aid directly. I wanted to tell the prime minister in strictest confidence that when we were in Iran we asked the Shah to organize a consortium of Greece, Iran, Turkey, maybe Jordan, to establish military assistance to Pakistan with American weapons. We did some of this illegally during the war, as the prime minister knows. To do it legally we will have to start a small arms program to Pakistan because there is a provision in our law that American weapons can be transferred to third countries only if those countries are eligible to receive American weapons directly," Kissinger said.

Chou En-lai said: "In December when went to give them twelve planes by Jordan it was not easy, nor did it give any good influence, impression [sic]."

Kissinger: "We had to do it because the Soviet Union was bringing so much pressure on Iran. There was a complicated arrangement. We flew Iranian planes to Jordan and Jordan planes to Pakistan. It was an emergency." He said the United States gave Iran more modern planes so that some of the Iranian planes could be free to go to Pakistan.

Chou: "And, Pakistan is still remaining a member of CENTO?"

Kissinger: "Yes, it is still technically a member of CENTO. But the major strategy is to give Pakistan enough strength so that India will not be able to attack it; or that it turns itself into a vassal of India and therefore frees India to move into Southeast Asia or other parts." Both Chou and Kissinger believed India intended to establish hegemony over both South and Southeast Asia, a scheme both insisted they must endeavor together to halt.

On 4 December, again Kissinger called Nixon, who was then vacationing in Florida. He briefed Nixon about the Security Council meeting, saying "The Chinese jumped all over the Russians and the Indians and apparently the Indians wanted to put on the agenda only the item of problems of East Pakistan and the Chinese said 'No, let's call it problems of India.' And that's all right if they all brawl with each other."

Nixon responded: "Good. Let the liberals choose now between China and India. That'll be very good."

Kissinger: "Actually, in terms of the political situation, first of all we won't take any more immediate flak, but in the six months the liberals are going to look like jerks, because the Indian occupation of East Pakistan is going to make the Pakistani one look like a child's play."

Nixon then turned to the on-going fighting. "God, you know what would really be poetic justice here is if some way the Paks could really give the Indians a bloody nose for a couple of days. The fighting, any report on that?" the president asked.

Kissinger: "Well, the fighting – we got reports in East Pakistan that the Indians are surprised at the intensity of the Pakistan resistance. But, of course, they outnumber them there eight to one."

Nixon: "How about West Pakistan?"

Kissinger: "In West Pakistan, the Indians don't seem to have gotten very far. And, there I think they're not going to be able to win except by wearing them down. They outnumber them there five to one. They've been bombing Karachi and burning the oil installations."

Nixon: "Isn't that awful. That is terrible. The Indians are bombing Karachi?"

Kissinger: "Yes."

Nixon: "Oh, for Christ's sake . . . Rawalpindi I notice is on the list, too."

Kissinger's conversation with Nixon followed Gandhi's declaration of war on Pakistan on 3 December. She told the Indians in a broadcast that Pakistan had attacked India earlier in the day, shortly after 5:30 p.m. Pakistan's air force had hit six Indian airfields in Kashmir and the Punjab. The Pakistani army shelled Indian positions and India had no option but to adopt a war footing.

Pakistan responded to the Indian charges in a note to the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad the same day. Pakistan said the Indian Air Force had been carrying out aggressive reconnaissance over West Pakistan for the last three or four days. Such action was a prelude to attacks started by the Indian army between 3:30 p.m. and 4 p.m. of 3 December at several points from Kashmir to Rahim Yar Khan. The attacks on the Indian airfields were necessary counter-measures.

American intelligence was unsure which side started the war, but Kissinger told Nixon that West Pakistan had attacked because the situation in the East was collapsing. Nixon refused to accept that. He advised his national security adviser to tell the Soviet Union that "when India talked about West Pakistan attacking them, it's like the Russians claiming to be attacked by Finland."

When the Washington Special Action Group met on 3 December, the CIA chief gave a rundown of the war. "We know that the Pakistanis did attack the three airfields at Srinagar, Amritsar and Pathankot this morning. It was first reported on the Indian radio and now the Pakistan radio has reported it. The Pakistan radio also says India is attacking all along the border."

Kissinger wanted to know if the Indians were seizing territory in the East.

Helms said, yes.

In East Pakistan, Moorer added, the Indians were trying to keep the Pakistan troops occupied to give the guerrillas more latitude. "It's just a matter of time until the Indians believe the guerrillas are strong enough, at which point they will recognize a Bangladesh government."

Kissinger: "You think it's just a question of time until the Pakistanis are exhausted?"

Moorer: "Yes."

Kissinger: "How about in the West? Whoever attacked, there will be a full-scale fighting."

Moorer: "I'm surprised that the Pakistanis attacked at such a low level. In 1965, they moved much more strongly. One of the airfields was a little army field and the other two had practically no aircraft on them. The major fields are farther south."

Helms predicted on 3 December that Gandhi in "her speech at 1:30 today will recognize Bangladesh".

On 4 December, Kissinger asked the CIA director whether India had declared an all-out war on Pakistan.

Helms: "They've said they have launched a 'no-holds-barred' offensive on East Pakistan."

Kissinger: "Has Yahya said anything of a comparable nature?" Helms: "He has said his army would push the invader back into his own territory and destroy him."

Kissinger: "Is that objectionable? Can the United Nations object to someone driving an enemy back? The Pakistan ambassador called me the other day to say he had been told by someone in the State Department to exercise restraint and wanted to know how he should do it. I told him to go back and ask the person who told him."

By then, Kissinger and other members of the group had no doubt India would win the war. "Everyone knows we will end up with Indian occupation of East Pakistan. It will be interesting to see how all those people who were so horrified at what the Pakistanis were doing in East Pakistan react when the Indians take over there," Kissinger told the group, while debating how the United States should present a Security Council resolution to end the war.

He suggested that Washington press hard at the United Nations on a ceasefire and withdrawal of forces before a political settlement. "And, we understand that we will not go along with any specifics on political accommodation. We will accept a general political settlement language, but not specifically related to Mujib's release," he said.

When Kissinger asked how long India could delay the proceedings before accepting ceasefire, Van Hollen said, "They will spin it out as long as possible, while they are moving militarily."

Helms replied, "Just about long enough to occupy East Pakistan."

On 6 December, the day India recognized Bangladesh, Gandhi wrote to Nixon informing him that India was at war with Pakistan. "I should stress to Your Excellency that the people and the government of India are determined that this wanton and unprovoked aggression should be decisively and finally repelled once and for all," she declared.

To Nixon, India's action was an attempt by Moscow and New Delhi to humiliate China and America. "Now, what the Russians this morning have launched is a blistering attack on Pakistan in TASS and, in effect, have warned the Chinese against getting involved. What we are seeing here is a Soviet-Indian power play to humiliate the Chinese and also somewhat us." Nixon told Kissinger when the two discussed the Soviet veto of the Security Council resolution of 5 December, calling for a ceasefire.

To convey Nixon's dismay to the Soviet leaders, Kissinger met on the same day with Yuli M. Vorontsov, minister counselor at the Soviet Embassy in Washington. He told the Soviet envoy that Nixon "did not understand how the Soviet Union could believe that it was possible to work on the broad amelioration of our relationships while at the same time encouraging the Indian military aggression against Pakistan. We did not take a position on the merits of the developments inside Pakistan that triggered this sequence of events. We have, indeed, always taken the position that we would encourage a political solution."

Vorontsov asked whether he could convey something about a political solution, since this was featured so prominently in Kosygin's letter. Kissinger said, "Our attitude towards a political solution was as follows: if there were a ceasefire and a withdrawal, the United States would be prepared to work immediately with the Soviet Union on ideas of a political solution. We recognized that substantial political autonomy for East Pakistan was the probable outcome of a political evolution, and we were willing to work in that direction."

Vorontsov later described the meeting in a telegram to the Soviet foreign minister.

"I asked Kissinger whether the U.S. government is taking any steps in its relations with Pakistan toward finding a political solution to the root cause of the present crisis – the situation in East Pakistan, which the Soviet government had called for in its 3 December letter to President Nixon." Kissinger said the U.S. side "had almost completed arrangements for talks between Yahya Khan and Bangladeshi representatives acceptable to Mujibur Rahman when India ruined everything by its invasion of Pakistan."

"But what kind of political talks could there be right now with regard to East Pakistan when foreign troops had invaded all of Pakistan?" Kissinger exclaimed in a somewhat excited tone. Then, in a calmer tone, he said that in any case matters had been moving and clearly continue to move towards granting political autonomy to East Pakistan.

If the war was stopped now and Pakistan was given "two months of peace and quiet," then as a result of political talks, such autonomy would become a reality. In proposing a halt to hostilities, the United States was not at all suggesting that the "period of peace and quiet" be used and then once again resume hostilities or "to restore the status quo in East Pakistan". America favored positive results from political talks, Vorontsov reported to Moscow, quoting Kissinger.

Then speaking on the "absolute necessity" of having the quickest possible ceasefire, he again said the Soviet support of India "is bringing Soviet-U.S. relations to a critical juncture." He expressed surprise on a purely personal level and questioned why the events between India and Pakistan were so insistently and obviously being extended to relations between Moscow and Washington.

"Soon after I returned from the White House, Kissinger called me at the embassy and said that he had just spoken with President Nixon by phone at his Florida home. Kissinger said that the president asked him to say in connection with our conversation that 'even if the conflict does end in the next few days, it will leave its mark on our relations' if it ends in the same vein in which it is developing right now. These events may turn out to be 'a watershed for our relations,' " the Soviet envoy conveyed to Moscow.

"Judging by Kissinger's tone during the entire conversation, one got the sense that the White House is nervous about the fairly complicated situation in which the United States has found itself given the current development of events on the Indian subcontinent," he explained.

He added, "The fact that the Soviet Union, not the United States, will gain all the political benefits if Bangladesh appears as a new country in Asia as a result of current events . . . has caused the hasty attempt to transfer the dissatisfaction over the situation in South Asia that is developing unfavorably for the United States onto Soviet-U.S. relations."

On 10 December at 10:51 a.m., Nixon met with Kissinger in the Oval Office for another round of discussion on South Asia. Nixon began by telling Kissinger about the protest the State Department was instructed to lodge about the strafing of U.S. military planes, (belonging to the U.S. defense representative and the United Nations ) on the ground in Pakistan, by the Indian Air Force. Nixon wanted to make certain that the protest had indeed been made.

Kissinger said the State Department did not promptly nor effectively carry out White House instructions. Then he briefed the president on the latest in the subcontinent. "I want to tell you what I have done, tentatively, subject to your approval. They've got this East Pakistan, they've got the offer of the commander of the Pakistan forces in East Pakistan to get a ceasefire and so forth. They [the State Department] were going to run to the Security Council and get that done. We don't want to be in a position where we push the Pakistanis over the cliff. So I told them to link the ceasefire in the East with the ceasefire in the West."

Kissinger said the ceasefire in the East had gone "down the drain". He added, "The major problem now is to protect the West."

Nixon nodded, "Yeah."

Kissinger continued, "I've got Vorontsov coming in at 11:30 and I'm going to tell him that what the Pakistanis did in the East was as a result of what we did. Which is true. I'm going to show him the Kennedy understanding. I'm going to hand him a very tough note to Brezhnev and say this is it now, let's settle the conflict, let's get a ceasefire now. That's the best that can be done now. They'll lose half of their country, but at least they preserve the other half."

Nixon agreed that "our desire is to save West Pakistan." He asked for an assurance that the necessary steps were being taken to keep the Seventh Fleet moving.

Kissinger assured him that "everything is moving." In addition to the carrier group, Kissinger reported that "four Jordanian planes have already moved to Pakistan, twenty-two more are coming. We're talking to the Saudis; the Turks we've now found are willing to give five."

Later in the conversation, Nixon asked when Kissinger planned to meet with the Chinese. At 5:30 p.m. Kissinger replied.

Nixon asked what would be discussed, and Kissinger said, "I'm going to tell them what forces we're moving."

Nixon: "Could you say it would be very helpful if they could move some forces or threaten to move some forces?"

Kissinger: "Absolutely."

Nixon: "They've got to threaten or they've got to move, one of the two. You know what I mean?"

Kissinger: "Yeah."

Nixon: "Threaten to move forces or move them, Henry, that's what they must do now. Now, goddammit, we're playing our role and that will restrain India. And, also tell them this will help us get the ceasefire." He indicated he did not want to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union that China would reject.

Kissinger: "If we stay strong, even if it comes out badly, we'll have come out well with the Chinese, which is important."

Nixon: "Coming back to this India-Pakistan thing, have we got anything else we can do?"

Kissinger: "I think we're going to crack it now."

Nixon: "Well, the Indians will be warned by the Chinese, right?"

Kissinger: "Well, I'll have to find out tonight."

Nixon: "You do your best, Henry. This should have been done long ago. The Chinese have not warned the Indians. They haven't warned them that they're going to come in. And, that's the point. They've got to warn them. All they've got to do is move something. Move their, move a division. You know, move some trucks. Fly some planes. You know, some symbolic act. We're not doing a goddamn thing, Henry, you know that. We're just moving things around, aren't we?"

Kissinger: "Yeah."

Nixon: "These Indians are cowards, right?"

Kissinger: "Right, but with Russian backing. You see the Russians have sent notes to Iran, Turkey, to a lot of countries threatening them. The Russians have played a miserable game."

In response to Nixon's question, Kissinger said the Russian threats were vague rather than specific. He felt that the Soviet Union would change course in light of Nixon's conversation with Soviet Agriculture Minister Vladimir Matskevich on 9 December. Kissinger felt that Nixon should make the point that Soviet support of the Indian use of force in East Pakistan raised serious questions as to whether the United States could work with Moscow on issues of mutual concern.

Looking ahead, Nixon posed the question of whether the United States should recognize the emerging political reality in East Pakistan. "What do we do about that? Are we going to just say Indian occupation or Bangladesh? Or what? Are we going to oppose Bangladesh recognition? What's our position? Is anybody involved on these things?"

He added that what was lacking was a plan, outlining "how we want it come out."

Kissinger replied: "After the Brezhnev letter came yesterday, we sent a copy of it to Yahya . . . And now Yahya has come back with a proposal saying ceasefire, negotiations for mutual withdrawal, and negotiations to settle the political future. And, then what will happen on Bangladesh, Mr. President, is that whatever West Pakistan and these people work out we will accept. But we will not be in the fore, in the front."

Nixon: "Whatever West Pakistan works out with whom?"

Kissinger: "The negotiations on East Pakistan."

Nixon: "But India will not agree to negotiations on East Pakistan."

Kissinger: "Yeah, but the Russians have already agreed to it. So what will happen, let's be realistic, what will happen is that the representatives of East Pakistan will demand independence. And, in practice, I think that is what West Pakistan will then agree to. But then it won't be us who have done it. This will solve the problem of do we recognize Bangladesh against the wishes of the Pakistan government."

Nixon: "We must never recognize Bangladesh until West Pakistan gives us the go ahead."

Nixon concurred with Kissinger's observation that "we have to continue to squeeze the Indians, even when this thing is settled." He instructed that the economic aid program for India be reprogrammed to help pay for the war damage suffered by Pakistan. Nixon also angrily instructed that a concerted effort be made to publicize India's role in the crisis: "Get a white paper out. I want the Indians blamed for this, you know what I mean? We can't let these goddamn sanctimonious Indians get away with this. Here they are raping and murdering. They talk about West Pakistan. These Indians are pretty vicious."



## Operation Liberate Dhaka

While the world powers debated the South Asian issue at the United Nations in early December, India's military pushed deeper into East Pakistan. On 6 December, Kissinger told Nixon the Indian forces were continuing their all-out offensive into East Pakistan. Heavier fighting was developing in the West, where the Pakistanis seemed to be taking the initiative. In East Pakistan, India was making a gradual progress on several fronts. India's aim was to force Pakistan to surrender in East Pakistan within a week. In the West, the Indian strategy was to maintain an essentially defensive posture until the battle was won in the East.

On the political front, Gandhi had announced India's long-anticipated recognition of Bangladesh as an independent nation. Even though its significance had been lessened by the hostilities, the Pakistanis responded by breaking diplomatic relations with India.

Kissinger's briefing took place in the background of a letter that Nixon had sent to Brezhnev on 6 December, essentially threatening the Soviet leadership with the possible cancellation of the US-Soviet summit scheduled for May 1972, and thus signaling his intention to put the US-Soviet relations in the cold storage.

"It is clear that the interests of all concerned states will be served if the territorial integrity of Pakistan was restored and the military action was brought to an end. Urgent action is required and I believe that your great influence in New Delhi should serve these ends," Nixon told Brezhnev. "I must state frankly that it would be illusory to think that if India can somehow achieve its objectives by military action the issue will be closed."

The same day, U.S. Defence Secretary Melvin Laird held a policy group meeting in which General Roy Westmoreland reported that India was trying to quickly end the fighting in East Pakistan. Gandhi had announced that India wanted to complete action in the East within ten days and re-deploy the troops to the West Pakistan borders. West Pakistan wanted to overwhelm the Indian forces in Kashmir, because the Pakistanis felt Kashmir would sufficiently compensate for their loss of East Pakistan.

If the Indians should mount a full-scale attack, the Americans estimated that in conjunction with the Mukti-Bahini guerrillas, India could take enough East Pakistani territory in ten days to establish the rebel government. If their activity was no more than what it was at present, however, it would allow the East Pakistani troops to withdraw to more easily defended positions and they could hold out for at least a month. The Americans figured that India's aircraft strikes at West Pakistan oil targets significantly reduced Pakistan's combat ability. Pakistan's strategy was to create a major diversion by attacking India from the West and taking Kashmir.

On December 6, when the Washington Special Action Group discussed Bangladesh, Kissinger asked how long the fight could last. Westmoreland, a Vietnam War commander, predicted it could, for up to three weeks.

Kissinger: "What will India do with Bangladesh? Will they see it as an independent state or have them negotiate with Islamabad?"

Helms: "Independent."

Sisco: "India has already recognized Bangladesh as an independent country."

Kissinger: "And, the Indians won't suggest that Bangladesh negotiate with Islamabad?"

Sisco: "Not now."

Kissinger: "I suspect the Indians may lose interest in Mujib."

Sisco: "I don't know whether they'll try to have him take over or not. They can afford it either way."

Kissinger: "Will the Indians withdraw their army once the Pakistanis are disarmed?"

Westmoreland: "No, I think they will leave three or four divisions to work with the Mukti Bahini, and pull the remainder back to the West."

Sisco: "I think they will pull out as quickly as they can. Once and if the Pak forces are disarmed, the Indians will have a basically friendly population. They can afford to move back to the border areas quickly. I say this with one caveat – this depends on what happens in the West. If the Paks can take a little piece of territory in the West as some sort of balance for East Pakistan, the Indians won't get out of Bangladesh quite so fast. They will see it as a further balance to the West."

Kissinger: "Will they permit Bangladesh to establish itself with an army and a separate foreign policy?"

Sisco: "I wouldn't exclude it. There is likely to be a continued Indian presence, however."

Van Hollen: "After the Indian army has been in East Pakistan for two or three weeks, they may come to be accepted as a Hindu army of occupation."

Kissinger: "Do you think they will establish Bangladesh in its present frontiers? Or will they settle the refugees along the border and then annex some territory?"

Van Hollen: "They may question whether they should send the refugees back now to a Bangladesh that is largely Muslim."

Kissinger: "Will there be a massive famine in East Pakistan?"

Williams: "They have a huge crop just coming in."

Kissinger: "How about the next spring?"

Williams: "Yes, there will be a famine by next spring unless they can pull themselves together by the end of March."

Kissinger: "And, we will be asked to bail out Bangladesh from famine next spring?"

Williams: "Yes."

Kissinger: "Then we had better start thinking about what our policy will be."

Williams: "By March, Bangladesh will need all kinds of help."

Johnson: "They'll be an international basket case."

Kissinger: "But not necessarily our basket case."

When the National Security Council met with Nixon on 6 December, the CIA chief said India's recognition of Bangladesh provided a justification for intervention in East Pakistan. He used a map to show the progress of Indian and Mukti Bahini forces in East Pakistan. Helms felt that ten days was a conservative estimate of how long it would be before the Pakistani forces in East Pakistan would be forced to surrender.

When Nixon met with Kissinger alone, the president regretted that he had not made his position clear enough to Gandhi during their meeting in November. "What I'm concerned about, I really worry about, is whether or not I was too easy on the goddamn woman when she was here." He felt that she had determined upon a course of action before their meeting and had "suckered" him in their talks.

Kissinger reminded him that the advice given to Nixon in the briefing materials prepared for the visit was to deal with Gandhi in such a way that she could not complain about her reception and use it as a pretext to pursue military action. Nixon said at least he was "tougher" on her than the briefing materials had advised.

In retrospect, Kissinger felt that a much tougher line had been called for. "When I look back on it now, should we have recommended to you to brutalize her privately? To say now I want you to know you do this and you will wreck your relations with us for five years, and we will look for every opportunity to damage you."

Nixon agreed: "That's right."

Kissinger: "That's probably what we should have done."

Nixon: "This woman suckered us. But let me tell you she's going to pay. She is going to pay. Now I mean on this aid side."

On 7 December, the General Assembly – by a vote of 104 to eleven, with ten abstentions – called on India and Pakistan to institute an immediate ceasefire and to withdraw troops from each other's territory. Pakistan accepted the resolution; India refused.

The same day, Yahya sent a message to Nixon through the backchannel in which he played up the communist-threat card to persuade America to come to Pakistan's aid against India.

"If India should succeed in its objective, the loss of East Pakistan with a population of seventy million people dominated by Russia will also be a threat to the security of South Asia," Yahya said. "It will bring under the Soviet domination the region of Assam, Burma, Thailand and Malaysia. The far-reaching consequences of such a development to the future of Asia need no comment."

He asked Nixon "to do whatever you can to relieve the pressure from our borders. There is need for urgent action to issue a stern warning to Russia and India to stop aggression against Pakistan. There is also an urgent need for material assistance from the United States of America, directly or indirectly, as you may consider appropriate to meet the situation."

Nixon replied the same day, assuring America's help to rescue the beleaguered president of Pakistan. "I want you to know that you have the understanding and support of the United States at this critical hour. We will continue our strong efforts to bring peace to the subcontinent, effect the withdrawal of Indian forces from your country, restore the territorial integrity of Pakistan, and see to it that political, not military, solutions are found for regional problems."

Nixon's words, however, did not calm Yahya's tense mind. Yahya realized that he had lost East Pakistan. On December 8, Farland sent a backchannel message to Kissinger, saying Yahya described the situation in East Pakistan as "beyond hope."

In contrast, Gandhi gave an upbeat report to the cabinet on 6 December, which was reported to Washington by a CIA mole in her cabinet. She reported that India was doing quite well on the diplomatic front. Gandhi said the Soviet Union's support in the United Nations showed the value of the Indo-Soviet friendship treaty. She said the Chinese did not intervene physically in the North. However, she said, the Soviets had warned her that the Chinese could "rattle the sword" in Ladakh and Chumbi areas. The Soviets had promised to counter-balance any such action.

Gandhi also told the cabinet that the United States might attempt to bring the ceasefire issue before the General Assembly session after another Soviet veto. She said India would not accept the advice of the General Assembly until Bangladesh was liberated and the southern area of Azad Kashmir – the part taken by Pakistan from India in 1947 – was captured. She said India would incorporate the southern part of Azad Kashmir for strategic rather than territorial reasons, because India had no desire to occupy any West Pakistan territory. She vowed to destroy the Pakistani armored and air force strength before she would accept a ceasefire so that Pakistan could never again invade India.

In her report to the cabinet, Gandhi castigated Washington. She said it was a pity that the United States had not changed its policy towards the subcontinent despite India's attempts. With Bangladesh emerging as an independent nation, she said, West Pakistan would be reduced to the size of other small West Asian countries, and the balance of forces would be favorable to India. The United States could not appreciate the changes taking place. However, the prime minister added, there was still time for America to alter its policy. She expected socialist countries to recognize Bangladesh shortly. India's immediate concern was to quickly finish the war.

On 8 December, Kissinger briefed Nixon about Gandhi's cabinet report. He said Pakistan continued to bitterly contest Indian gains in East Pakistan, but the consensus among veteran military observers and media analysts was that the end of the Pakistan army's effective resistance might come sooner than expected. The CIA estimated that the Indians and the guerrillas probably controlled about half the province and were progressively isolating the Pakistan army as they gained control of strategic points. The U.S. consul general in Dhaka commented that the "noose is obviously getting tighter" for the Pakistanis in the East.

Fighting in the West had also reportedly intensified, although the Indians still seemed to be essentially on the defensive and had not yet launched a major counter-offensive. The Pakistanis had mounted two substantial drives into Kashmir and seemed to have made some progress. There was also fighting to the south on the Punjab plain, but the results so far were inconclusive. The Indians have, however, penetrated at least fifteen miles into West Pakistan in the direction of Karachi. Both sides continued to make air strikes on the western front, but neither had yet gained the upper hand.

The CIA had reviewed China's military position along the Indian border and concluded that the Chinese were not militarily prepared for a major and sustained involvement in the Indo-Pak war. It seemed clear that an involvement on the scale of the 1962 invasion of India was probably beyond China's present capabilities. China did, however, retain the option of a smaller-scale effort, ranging from overt troop movements and publicized preparations, to aggressive patrolling and harassment of Indian border outposts on a limited diversionary attack.

As the Indian forces and the Mukti Bahini advanced towards Dhaka, the Americans started thinking about evacuation. The United Nations had been attempting for several days to arrange the evacuation of foreign nationals from Dhaka, but had failed because of Indian military operations.

The Dhaka airfield was “unusable.” It would probably require repairs during a ceasefire before it could handle evacuation flights. The United Nations was gearing up for another airlift attempt, including some one hundred Americans, but it might well turn out that an evacuation by helicopters operating off an aircraft carrier was the only answer.

On 8 December, the CIA director informed Nixon’s advisers that the Indian forces had broken through Pakistani lines in Comilla, about fifty miles east of Dhaka. The situation was deteriorating for Pakistani forces throughout East Pakistan. In the West, Pakistan claimed to have captured Poonch on the Kashmir ceasefire line, but admitted to sustaining heavy casualties in Kashmir and in a tank battle on the Sind-Rajasthan frontier. Helms told the Washington Special Action Group, the Pakistani forces in East Pakistan were under such heavy pressure from the Indian offensive that they had begun to destroy their military records.

Sisco asked Helms: “How long do you think the Paks can hold out in the East?”

Helms: “Forty-eight hours – if it were not for the rivers, it would be over by now.”

Kissinger asked General John D. Ryan of the Joint Chiefs, “What is your assessment of the military situation in the West?”

Ryan: “We still think the Indians plan a holding action – we don’t think they will push very hard.”

Kissinger: “How long would it take them to transfer their troops from East to West?”

Ryan: “It would take a long time for a transfer of all their divisions, but their airborne division could be transferred in five or six days.”

Williams: “It is twenty-eight hours by train from Calcutta to New Delhi, to give you some idea of time. This would mean, of course, clearing the rail line and using it exclusively for the troop transport.”

Ryan: “How much they would want to transfer to the West is debatable. The Indians already have superiority in the West.”

Kissinger: “If India turns on West Pakistan, takes Azad Kashmir and smashes the Pak air and tank forces, a number of things seems inevitable. Should we, in full conscience, allow the liberation of the same disintegrating forces in West Pakistan as in the East? Baluchistan and other comparable issues are bound to come to the fore, as Mrs. Gandhi indicated to the president and as she told a Columbia University seminar in New York, I understand. Pakistan would be left defenseless and West Pakistan would be turned into a vassal state. We have to decide some questions – the military supply question, for example. I have reviewed the cables to Jordan, which enthusiastically tell Hussein he can’t furnish planes to the Paks. We shouldn’t decide this on such doctrinaire grounds. The question is, when an American ally is being raped, whether or not the United States should participate in enforcing a blockade of our ally, when the other side is getting the Soviet aid. I don’t know what the decision will be, but we have to consider this in broader terms. That’s why I’m holding up your cables. In any event, they should be toned down.”

Sisco: “We should tell Hussein to keep his options open. The question of military supply in the context of East Pakistan is one thing. If the situation evolves in the West as Henry describes, and there is a serious risk to West Pakistan, that’s something else. Personally, I doubt that that is the Indian objective, but it may be.”

Johnson: “Singh told Keating that India had no intention of taking ‘any’ territory. He was presumably referring to Kashmir.”

Sisco: “I wonder if they’re not making a distinction here – Kashmir is a disputed area. I suspect they’re really talking about something other than that strip of Azad Kashmir that Dick [Helms] referred to.”

Helms: “In this connection, Mrs. Gandhi told her cabinet that she had expected a more balanced view from the Chinese. She expressed the hope that the Chinese would not intervene physically in the north, but said that the Soviets had said the Chinese would be able to ‘rattle the sword’. She also said that the Soviets have promised to counterbalance any such action.”

Johnson [to Helms]: Your briefing this morning said there was no Chinese buildup in the area.”

Helms: “They already have enough forces there to rattle the sword. They have the people there to make some motions.”

Kissinger: “We have two military supply questions: 1) to get King Hussein into a holding pattern on the provision of aircraft to Pakistan, while the president considers the issue; and 2) how to convey to the Indians and possibly the Soviet Union that a turn of their attention to West Pakistan would present some problems.”

Packard: “The basic problem is that we can’t authorize Jordan to do anything we can’t do ourselves. If a third country has some planes that we don’t have, we could authorize them to supply them to Pakistan. In these circumstances, it might be better for us to supply the planes directly, but we can’t authorize Jordan to do it unless we are authorized to do it ourselves.”

Johnson: “We would have to make a judgment that Pakistan is eligible to make such purchases and then notify the Congress.”

Kissinger: “If we hadn’t cut off arms to Pakistan, this problem wouldn’t exist.”

Packard: “That’s right.”

Kissinger: “We didn’t analyze what the real danger was at the time we took that step – we all failed there. If we had understood the implications – I was wrong too – we were all wrong.”

“Packard: “There’s another issue on Jordan – if they deliver the planes to Pakistan, we will have to replace them, since we can’t afford to let Jordan weaken itself.”

Kissinger: “What is the judgment of this group? We have a country, supported and equipped by the Soviet Union, turning one-half of another country into a satellite state and the other half into an impotent vassal. Leaving aside any American interest in the subcontinent, what conclusions will other countries draw from this in their dealings with the Soviets? Dick [Helms], would you do an analysis of this?”

Helms: “Don’t we have some obligation under CENTO?”

Johnson: “No legal obligation.”

Kissinger: “We had no legal obligation to India in 1962, but we came to the conclusion that if China should overrun India, it would present us with great problems. I’ve read the bilateral treaty, and it’s not easy to escape the conclusion that some conditions which would warrant some involvement of the constitutional process are close by. If India succeeds, what would be the impact in the larger theater of world affairs?”

Packard: “It would negate SEATO.”

Johnson: “An Indian attack against Pakistan is excluded from SEATO.”

Packard: “But as a practical matter, SEATO would be down the drain.”

Kissinger: "We have been talking for two years about a Security Council guarantee for the Middle East. What is the impact of the recent chain of events on other areas and expectations in other areas? Let's look at the military supply question. We could say that we have done everything two weeks too late. If we wait until India takes Azad Kashmir, then take action on military supplies for Pakistan, we would merely infuriate the Indians and demonstrate our impotence. If we had cut off aid two weeks ago, it might have had some influence on the situation in the East, instead of being a grandstand play. Let's look at this whole picture."

Packard: "We should consider some way that would help West Pakistan hold its own."

Kissinger: "How?"

Johnson: "I agree this should be examined. We should consider exactly what effect military supplies could have."

Kissinger: "There are two separate problems: The threat of military supply and the fact of such supply. Once a war in West Pakistan is engaged, provision of planes by Jordan might combine all the disadvantages. I'm more interested in the deterrent effect. If it were done as a token before the war, it would be an indication that, while we don't accept what has happened in East Pakistan, we can't do anything about it, but if they move in West Pakistan, it would be a whole new ball game."

Van Hollen: "We could pick up both elements – ask for specific Indian assurances on Azad Kashmir and that they do not seek to destroy Pak forces in the West."

Kissinger: "We should also make it clear that if they do, they will face a new situation."

Johnson: "Of course, the Paks are trying to bite off Kashmir."

Kissinger: "I don't think they have the punch."

Armistead Selden, deputy assistant secretary of Defense, said, "We have a new report indicating that the Paks may have knocked out as many as one hundred and twenty Indian planes on their first attacks on those four airfields."

Helms: "Our 1962 assurances to Ayub made it clear that we would come to Pakistan's assistance in the face of aggression against Pakistan from India."

Van Hollen: "That was in the context of our assurances to India when China moved in. This was overtaken by the events of 1965, and our legal people don't think the Paks have a binding case in international law."

Johnson: "If we want to assist Pakistan, we can find a basis for doing it."

Van Hollen: "If we make a policy decision to assist Pakistan militarily, we don't have to worry about it."

Kissinger: "If the word of a country has any legal meaning, it seems to me this would apply. The Pakistanis haven't raised it with us yet, of course."

Packard: "There is the practical problem, though – if we do anything, we should do something effective."

Helms: "I agree. If we don't win, don't do it."

Packard: "We should take a good look at it."

Williams: "In 1965, the Pakistanis closed our base at Peshawar and for all practical purposes left CENTO. With the fall of East Pakistan two days away, I think an attempt to get a ceasefire in West Pakistan needs to be made diplomatically."

Johnson: "But that would stop the Pakistanis in Kashmir."

Williams: "But if they will be chewed up, we might be doing them a favor."

## **Gandhi Plans To "Balkanize" West Pakistan**

After leaving the meeting, Kissinger joined Nixon and U.S. Attorney General John Mitchell in the Old Executive Office Building to discuss the crisis. Kissinger referred to a message from the Shah that Iran could not send aircraft to support Pakistan, because of the Indo-Soviet treaty. Shah proposed that Jordan send its planes to Pakistan, because the Pakistanis could fly Jordanian planes. Then Iran would send its planes to Jordan with Iranian pilots to cover Jordan, while they were engaged in Pakistan.

Nixon said: "I think we could get a commitment from Israel on the Jordanians." He then instructed Kissinger to discuss the matter with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir. "When you talk to her, you tell her, Henry, that this is a goddamn Russian ploy."

Turning to the situation in East Pakistan, Kissinger warned that "the Indian plan is now clear. They are going to move their forces from East Pakistan to the West. They will then smash the Pakistan land forces and air forces." He added that India planned to "annex the part of Kashmir that is in Pakistan".

Kissinger said Gandhi's goal was to "Balkanize" West Pakistan into units such as Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier Province. West Pakistan would become a state akin to Afghanistan and East Pakistan would equate with Bhutan. "All of this would have been achieved by the Soviet support, Soviet arms and Indian military force."

Kissinger warned that "the impact of this on many countries threatened by the Soviet Union" would be serious. He pointed in particular to the potential impact upon the Middle East. If the crisis resulted in "the complete dismemberment of Pakistan," he worried China might conclude that the United States was "just too weak" to have prevented the humiliation of an ally.

Kissinger felt that the Chinese would then look to other options "to break their encirclement".

"So I think this, unfortunately, has turned into a big watershed." Kissinger then suggested how Nixon should react in this "tough situation". "It seems to me that what we have to do now, or what I would recommend, is where we went wrong before is not to try to scare off the Indians."

Nixon asked: "How could we scare them?"

Kissinger offered no concrete answer, but said that if Nixon's advisers had understood the situation better they would have proposed a stronger response to Indian actions. He assured Nixon that he had done "exactly what all your advisers recommended".

Nixon said he had warned Gandhi during her visit to Washington: "I told her that any war would be very, very unacceptable."

Kissinger observed that any such warning obviously fell on deaf ears: "She was determined to go" into East Pakistan. "We should have been

tougher with the Russians.”

Nixon: “What could we have done?”

Kissinger: “We should have told them what we finally told them last Sunday [5 December] that this would mark a watershed in our relationship, that there could be no Middle East negotiations if this thing would grow. We would have to play it tough. And, thirdly, we should have cut off economic aid the first or second day, plus all of arms instead of waiting ten days and diddling around.

Nixon: “We have done all of that. But I ordered all of that.” Kissinger felt that the United States had responded too slowly in the fast moving situation, a failing he ascribed in part to insufficient concentration of control in the White House.

Nixon asked: “Now what do we do?”

Kissinger outlined two choices: “We have got to convince the Indians now, we’ve got to scare them off from an attack on West Pakistan as much as we possibly can. And, therefore, we’ve got to get another tough warning to the Russians.”

Kissinger noted that in doing so, “You are risking the summit. On the other hand, the summit may not be worth a damn if they lose – if they kick you around.”

Kissinger’s judgement, in military terms, was that, “we have only one hope now: to convince the Indians the thing is going to escalate. And to convince the Russians that they are going to pay an enormous price.” Referring to America’s ban on arms supply to Pakistan, he said, “It may not work, Mr. President . . . we can’t make up six years of military imbalance.”

Nixon: “We should never have let it get out of balance.” He attributed the military imbalance on the subcontinent in good part to President Lyndon Johnson – “to his great discredit”.

Kissinger, for his part, faulted the bureaucracy. “You promised Yahya on your first visit to send some arms.” The difficulty was to get the bureaucracy to fulfill the promise. “We didn’t know there would be a war in ’71, but it took a year to get your promise to Yahya worked out.”

Nixon turned to the question of whether to encourage a transfer of planes to Pakistan. Kissinger and Nixon agreed that the issue posed a risk.

Kissinger said: “I think we’re in trouble. If we did this, we could give a note to the Chinese and say if you are ever going to move, this is the time.”

Nixon agreed: “All right, that’s what we’ll do.”

Mitchell observed: “All they have to do is put their forces on the border.”

Kissinger noted the danger of a corresponding move by the Soviet Union to support India. “I must warn you, Mr. President, if our bluff is called, we’ll be in trouble.”

Nixon said the Soviets had to “cold-bloodlessly make the decision”.

Kissinger: “We’ve got to make it within thirty-six hours.”

Nixon: “No more goddamn meetings to decide this.”

Kissinger promised to offer Nixon his choices after the meeting of the Washington Special Action Group the following day.

Nixon said that one of his choices was to do relatively little to intervene further in the crisis. “If we let it go,” he told Kissinger, “your fear is that it will certainly screw up the South Asian area. Your greater fear, however, is that it may get . . . the Chinese stirred up so that they do something else. . . . And, it will encourage the Russians to do the same thing someplace else.”

Kissinger concurred. He pointed to the possible implications for the Middle East.

Nixon: “I am for doing anything.”

Kissinger worried that the United States lacked the requisite punch to make an intervention effective.

Nixon agreed: “We can’t do this without the Chinese helping us. As I look at this thing, the Chinese have got to move to that damn border. The Indians have got to get a little scared.”

He instructed Kissinger to get a message to that effect to the Chinese.

Beyond approaching China, Nixon wondered, “what really we can do to affect the outcome.”

Kissinger said one thing that could be done was to encourage Jordan to transfer planes to Pakistan. Another would be to move the carrier force into the Bay of Bengal.

Nixon said another form of pressure on New Delhi would be to brand India publicly as an aggressor. He instructed Kissinger to discuss a coordinated move with China. He told him to go to New York to meet the Chinese and say he had a message from the president for the premier, Chou En-lai.

Kissinger said he was more optimistic than he had been earlier that China would respond positively to a suggestion regarding a coordinated move. “They know,” he said, “that this is a dress rehearsal of what could happen to them.” Kissinger was alluding to the issue of Tibet.

Nixon picked up on that theme: “What I would like to do in a note to the Chinese is to state exactly that, that I consider this to be a dress rehearsal and I think their move toward the border would restrain India.”

## **Nixon Urges China To Scare India**

In the evening of 8 December, Nixon talked with Kissinger on the phone. He said the United States could not suggest to the Soviet Union that the situation in South Asia should revert to the status quo ante, but, “we can say ‘get the hell out of West Pakistan.’”

Kissinger: “At this stage, we have to prevent an Indian attack on West Pakistan.”

Nixon agreed.

Kissinger: “We have to maintain the position of withdrawal from all of Pakistan.”

He concluded that if America held firm in its approach to India and the Soviet Union, the administration would achieve its overall goals, even if it failed to prevent India from breaking Pakistan: “If they maintain their respect for us even if you lose, we still will come out all right.”

For Kissinger, it was a question of preserving America’s credibility and honor. By introducing the U.S. military power into the equation in the

form of a carrier and other units from the Seventh Fleet, America sought to stop “a Soviet stooge, supported by Soviet arms” from overrunning an ally.

Nixon believed that China could help restrain India. “I tell you a movement of even some Chinese toward that border could scare those goddamn Indians to death.”

Kissinger agreed: “As soon as we have made the decision here, we can then talk to the Chinese.”

## **U.S. Betrayed Pakistan, China Charges**

On 10 December, Kissinger and George H.W. Bush, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, met with the Chinese permanent representative in New York. After giving the Chinese an account of Nixon’s message to Brezhnev and the ceasefire idea, Kissinger encouraged China to join the war. “If the People’s Republic were to consider the situation on the Indian subcontinent a threat to its security, and if it took measures to protect its security, the United States would oppose efforts of others to interfere with the People’s Republic.”

He said Washington’s immediate goal was to stop West Pakistan’s destruction. “We are afraid that if nothing is done to stop it, East Pakistan will become a Bhutan and West Pakistan will become a Nepal. And, India with the Soviet help would be free to turn its energies elsewhere,” an allusion to Southeast Asia.

Huang Hua, the Chinese permanent representative to the United Nations, apparently took Kissinger’s hint in an unintended way. He responded: “We are prepared for attacks on the east, west, north, and south. We are prepared to engage in guerrilla warfare once again with millet and rifle, and we are prepared to begin our construction over again, after that eventuality. And, the private attitude adopted by Brezhnev which we see now, in which he talks about so-called political negotiations is in fact direct and obvious intervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign country and something we feel is completely unacceptable, is inadmissible.”

He then added: “We feel that the struggle waged by the people in Pakistan is a just struggle and, therefore, it is bound to have the support of the Chinese people and the people of the world.

Kissinger: “We want to preserve the army in West Pakistan so that it is better able to fight if the situation rises again. We are also prepared to attempt to assemble a maximum amount of pressure in order to deter India.

“We want to keep the pressure on India, both militarily and politically. We have no interest in political negotiations between Pakistani leaders and East Pakistani leaders as such. The only interest that we possibly have is to get the Soviet agreement to a united Pakistan. We have no interest in an agreement between Bangladesh and Pakistan.

“We are prepared also to consider simply a ceasefire. We are prepared also to follow your course in the U.N, which most of my colleagues would be delighted to do and then Pakistan would be destroyed. If we followed your course of insisting on ceasefire and withdrawal and do nothing then Pakistan will be destroyed, and many people in America will be delighted. If you and Pakistan want this then we will do it. That is no problem for us. That is the easiest course for us.”

Kissinger continued: “It is our judgment, with great sorrow, that the Pakistan army in two weeks will disintegrate in the West as it has disintegrated in the East. If we are wrong about this, we are wrong about everything. What do you think of ceasefire without political negotiations? The only reason we want political negotiations at all is to preserve East Pakistan, not to weaken it.”

Huang: “Why should we not condemn India for its aggression against East Pakistan? Why should there not be a demand for the resolution already passed in the General Assembly which calls for withdrawal?”

Kissinger: “We are not saying we accept the occupation of East Pakistan; we don’t have to accept that. But this would be a resolution for a ceasefire only. And the Arabs would not accept the occupation of their territory even though there is a ceasefire.”

Kissinger added: “When I asked for this meeting, I did so to suggest Chinese military help, to be quite honest. That’s what I had in mind, not to discuss with you how to defeat Pakistan. What is going to happen is that the Pakistani commander in East Pakistan, independent of anything we did, has asked the U.N. to arrange a ceasefire in East Pakistan.”

Huang promised to transmit immediately Kissinger’s message to Beijing.

Kissinger: “We are looking for a way to protect what is left of Pakistan. We will not recognize Bangladesh. We will not negotiate with Bangladesh. We will not encourage talks between Pakistan and Bangladesh.”

Huang wanted to know if Bush recently met with anybody from Bangladesh. His question stemmed from a story that appeared in the U.S. media saying Bush had met with a Bengali delegation in New York.

Three weeks earlier, Bush explained, Justice Abu Syeed Chowdhury asked for an appointment in his capacity as a judge in Pakistan. He had his staff do a background check on the man. Chowdhury then made a personal call, and brought along three men. When their group started mentioning Bangladesh in the conversation, Bush cut them off, pointing out that Chowdhury was supposed to be seeing him as a judge. He told Chowdhury’s team that he was barred from discussing Bangladesh matters with them.

Huang: “I am clear now.”

Kissinger: “In any event, no matter what you read, no one is authorized to talk to Bangladesh. We don’t recognize Bangladesh and will not recognize it.”

Huang said he would immediately send this message to Chou Enlai.

Kissinger had expected China to join the war after India moved its soldiers into East Pakistan. During a visit to China in June 1972, he raised this point during his discussion with Chou En-lai, noting that Nixon had risked a major confrontation with the Soviet Union to save West Pakistan and hoped China would come to Pakistan’s aid.

“When I mentioned that we had expected military moves by the People’s Republic of China, Chou was somewhat defensive, pointing out that poor Pakistani military strategy had crumpled East Pakistan before any outside help would have done any good. He noted that Yahya had dispersed his forces too thinly; and he revealed that two divisions of Chinese military equipment had been lost without a fight,” Kissinger reported to Nixon in a memo on 27 June 1972.

Three years later, when President Gerald Ford visited Beijing, Deputy Premier Deng Xiao Ping brought up the 1971 war issue, accusing the United States of betraying Pakistan. Deng's statement put Kissinger on the defensive.

Deng charged: "After your [Secretary Kissinger's] second visit to China, Pakistan was dismembered. And, Premier Chou En-lai told the Doctor – and it might be counted as criticism, but with good intention – that you took no effective action, because your tone was of advice and not the tone of warning.

"When the Soviet Union took action with regard to India, it paid attention to the attitude of the United States because it knew China's capability was quite limited. We have good relations with Pakistan and also have rendered some help to Pakistan, but our equipment is backward. Only the United States can give them some good things either directly or indirectly."

Kissinger replied he agreed with Chou En-lai's analysis and did not consider it an unfair comment at all. "But our situation was complicated by two factors: One, the Vietnam War and the domestic difficulties caused by it; and second, President Yahya Khan was not the greatest leader of which history informs us. He made great mistakes politically and militarily. So he made it very hard for us, but you will [also] remember the difficulties President Nixon and I had in America. But President Nixon and I had made the decision – for your information – that if you had moved and the Soviet Union had brought pressure on you, we would have given [China] military support – even though the Shanghai Communiqué was not yet issued. We understand why you didn't, but you should know our position, our seriousness of purpose."

On 9 December, Kissinger told Nixon that the Indian forces in East Pakistan were making steady progress on several fronts and were at one point only twenty-two miles from Dhaka. The most immediate threat was from the East, but the Indians must make a major river crossing if their thrust was to continue. Chittagong, the second largest city in the province, had been cut off from Dhaka. How long the Pakistani resistance would continue depended on whether the Pakistani forces gave up or were captured as their posts were taken or could fall back in a relatively good order to a few urban centers like Dhaka for a last-ditch defense.

Pakistan's resistance capability was less than promising. Farland reported that during a conversation on 8 December, Yahya seemed resigned that he could do nothing more to help his troops in the East; he still did say that they would fight "to the last Muslim". The ambassador had also received reports of desertions by the members of army and police units, but there had been no indications yet that discipline was collapsing or that large numbers were surrendering.

In New Delhi, meanwhile, India's defense secretary put forth a "personal suggestion" on 8 December that India could be more effective in protecting the minorities in East Pakistan, including West Pakistani soldiers, if the Pakistani government were prepared to arrange an orderly Bangladesh takeover.

In the West, the military situation remained about the same. The Indians, with the exception of an extending penetration toward Karachi in the south, were still in a holding posture on the ground, while conducting repeated air attacks against military targets throughout West Pakistan.

The Pakistanis were taking some initiative in the Punjab plain and especially along the Kashmir ceasefire line, and there were reports of an increased offensive in the following day or two. However, they were still to launch the major offensive that many expected. It was possible that they were hoping that the Indians would be ready to stop or at least more subject to international pressure once East Pakistan fell and did not want to unnecessarily provoke a major Indian counter-offensive in the West. On the other hand, if the Indians did shift to an all-out offensive in the West, the Pakistanis would still have most of their forces intact to defend their heartland.

At 10 a.m. on 9 December, Moorer told Nixon's advisers that "in East Pakistan, in the absence of a ceasefire, it's just a matter of time until the Pakistan army will be essentially ineffective." There was, however, no indication that their morale had been broken. Their supplies were cut off and they had no air left. Any serious fighting could be over in ten days or two weeks, depending on whether the Pakistanis continue to fight to the last man or begin to surrender in large numbers.

In West Pakistan, the Pakistanis were slightly superior in numbers, with about 100,000 men. They were trying to occupy enough of Kashmir to give them a bargaining chip if and when there was a ceasefire. They were trying to block the main lines of communication. In the south of the Kashmir area, the Indians outnumbered the Pakistanis two-to-one. They might plan to move south to Lahore, although there was no indication. The best Pakistan could do was to gain as much control of Kashmir as possible. Moorer added that the Pakistanis could continue for about three weeks or so. However, if there was a period of attrition, with no ceasefire, the Indians could hold out longer.

Kissinger: "So if the war is prolonged, it won't make any difference if the Paks take Kashmir, since they wouldn't be able to hold it."

Moorer: "Yes, but that is their only chance."

Kissinger: "Yesterday someone here said a ceasefire in West Pakistan would work to the disadvantage of the Paks. Now do I understand that you are saying that a prolonged war, even if the Paks get Kashmir, will lead to the destruction of the Pak army?"

Moorer: "Exactly. When East Pakistan is gone, the Indians will transfer their divisions to West – possibly four of the six divisions now in the East. This will take one to three weeks, depending on how much air they use. If the war continues to the end, the outcome for Pakistan is inevitable."

Kissinger: "So we have to prevent an Indian onslaught on West Pakistan, since the outcome will be the same as in East Pakistan. The Indians will then control the area to Bhutan in the East and Nepal in the West."

Irwin noted that the 9 December CIA paper, which examined the implications of an Indian victory over Pakistan, predicted the possible acceleration of the break-up tendencies in West Pakistan – possibly into as many as four separate states.

Johnson: "That sounds reasonable."

Kissinger then raised a policy decision question as to the U.S. role regarding West Pakistan: "Are we agreed that we should do our best to prevent an Indian attack on West Pakistan? That this is our chief objective?"

Irwin: "The question is how to do it. To what degree would this require involvement of the United States?"

Johnson: "I think we should make a maximum effort with both sides to bring the fighting to a stop. The Paks have already accepted the U.N. ceasefire resolution."

Kissinger: "Is that all we can do?"

Armistead Selden, deputy assistant secretary of Defense, asked: "What will be the fate of the Pak army in East Pakistan? There will be a massacre if they keep on fighting."

Johnson: "What can we do in the East?"

Helms: "There is nothing to do. There is no way of getting them out."

Johnson: "India can afford to withdraw their troops from East Pakistan, once the Mukti Bahini are in the saddle."

James H. Noyes, assistant secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs, interjected: "The more territory Pakistan takes in the West, the more provocation this is to India – the more justification India has to continue."

Moorer: "India doesn't need any provocation or justification. They have a plan and they are carrying it out."

Johnson: "And, the Paks can't prevent it."

Helms: "What leverage do we have on India?"

Johnson: "None. I'm talking about our objectives." He then asked whether the United States should ask Yahya about arranging a ceasefire to restore "the status quo ante in the West".

Kissinger: "Wouldn't he say 'they have taken half my country, and I can't talk about it'?"

Johnson: "What is the alternative – continued fighting in the West until his forces are destroyed?"

Williams: "But Yahya doesn't expect this to happen. He expects the fighting will be stopped by the great powers. He expects them to bring it to a halt and then to go to some form of a negotiating table."

Moorer: "Is there any way to get NATO into the act?"

Helms: "The British and French don't go along with us."

Williams: "If we approach the Indians, their response will probably be that they will stop the war in the West in return for Pakistan's recognition of Bangladesh."

Johnson: "But with the destruction of the Pak forces in the East, they can't do anything anyway."

Williams: "But the Indians have already said this is what they want, and we would get this response to any approach to them. Once they achieve their objective in the East, there is the possibility that they may stop."

Irwin: "But they have said they intend to destroy the Pak army and air force and straighten out the line on Kashmir."

Kissinger: "If they destroy the army and the air force, Pakistan will be in their paws. The result would be a nation of 100 million people dismembered, their political structure changed by military attack, despite a treaty of alliance with and private assurances by the United States. And, all the other countries, on whom we have considered we could rely, such as Iran, would know that this has been done by the weight of Soviet arms and with Soviet diplomatic support. What will be the effect in the Middle East, for example – could we tell Israel that she should give up something along a line from A to B, in return for something else, with any plausibility?"

Sisco: "I don't accept that view. We do have a kind of alliance with Pakistan in both the CENTO and the bilateral context, but that alliance was against communist aggression. I grant that the Russians are behind India in this, but our commitment was not in the India-Pakistan context. I don't believe Iran or Israel or any other Middle Eastern country expect direct U.S. involvement in South Asia."

Sisco dismissed a far-reaching impact as Kissinger painted: "I don't see the implication for the rest of the world that you draw. I have the impression from what Yahya told Farland that he has 'accepted' the inevitable result in East Pakistan. We can't do anything about that. East Pakistan is gone and we both have to face that fact. The thing that confronts Yahya and us in relation to the balance on the subcontinent is what happens in West Pakistan. It is not in our interest to have India destroy the Pak army in West Pakistan or otherwise effect a further radical change in the status quo, possibly resulting in the fractionalization of Pakistan. I think we have three options: (1) we can do nothing – complete non-involvement – in which case East Pakistan would be lost, India would destroy the Pak army and would take at least Azad Kashmir. This is clearly unacceptable. (2) That we not accept this situation, but see what we can do diplomatically or otherwise to deter the Indians from their present course. We should recognize that we are limited in the ways in which we can deter the Indians. Even if we should move rapidly on arms supply to the Paks, this would have only a marginal effect."

Kissinger asked Sisco whether his suggestions were based on the assumption that "the Indians were willing to press the fighting to a conclusion."

Sisco responded: "Yes. We should ask ourselves how we could deter the Indians so as to end with a West Pakistan based on the status quo ante, including no alteration of the boundaries of Kashmir."

Kissinger: "Would you accept Bangladesh?"

Sisco avoided a direct answer: "I have no problem with going to the Indians alone, as you suggest. We should also go to the Russians. I think we should also have a serious talk with Yahya."

Kissinger: "What would be the point of a serious talk with Yahya?"

Sisco: "To see how he reads his position. I realize this is an oversimplification, but Yahya is faced with a situation involving the sure destruction of elements of his government in East Pakistan. How does he read his capability in the West? Probably not as we do. Given the disproportionate military capability between India and Pakistan, we see the likelihood of a Pak defeat. But if Yahya doesn't read it that way, he may want to continue the military struggle. If he wants to do this, we're not in a position to second-guess him. The fundamental question is whether we should try to have some exchange along the line that the East is pretty well lost, and how do we save the rest of Pakistan?"

Kissinger: "So we would go to Yahya and say he should settle now?" Sisco: "Yahya is faced with the necessity of cutting his losses and saving West Pakistan."

Kissinger: "Suppose Yahya says yes, and the Indians say he has to recognize Bangladesh?"

Sisco: "We shouldn't press him to do that. I'm stating the situation in bold terms."

Johnson: "India doesn't need Yahya's recognition of Bangladesh. Neither Yahya nor the United States can restore the status quo ante in Bangladesh. There is nothing Yahya can do, even if he doesn't accept the loss."

Williams: "We have only a limited leverage on India. In the absence of any assurance that a military supply effort would be effective and would make any difference in the military balance, we're in a terribly weak position. I think we need something additional if we are to extract Yahya with some shred of honor. I think we should go back to a sharpened Security Council resolution – a steadfast of some sort which would save the army



and hold to the demarcation of the present boundaries. We might add Bangladesh to this equation in some way.”

Sisco: “I don’t exclude the possibility of a deal of some sort, even now.”

Williams: “There are still elements of concession. Don’t forget that the spirit of nationalism was terribly strong in East Pakistan even before the fighting broke out. This is where any talent we have needs to be applied. I think we should discuss it with Yahya. If we put some force behind it, we may even have a chance of getting the Russians behind it. Many West Pakistanis will recognize and accept the loss of East Pakistan, although it will be hard for the army to take.”

Kissinger: “Assuming that this kind of option will be kept open, the president wants India to understand very clearly that we would not look with indifference on an Indian onslaught on West Pakistan. Our press spokesmen should not press the idea of neutrality or noninvolvement to the point that the Indians could misunderstand that this foretells our attitude toward an attack on West Pakistan. We should keep open the option of trying to deter the Indians, by a show of force, if necessary.”

Kissinger then asked Moorer if he could give the pros and cons of getting an American aircraft carrier into the Bay of Bengal and make it appear as if it was meant to evacuate Americans, although in reality to threaten the Soviets and the Indians. The point of Moorer’s analysis became mute when Kissinger met with Nixon in the Oval Office after the meeting and the president ordered him to move the carrier, ruling out Kissinger’s mild opposition. Kissinger opposed the move based on advice from Treasury Secretary John Connally, who favored using a helicopter ship rather than a carrier, as the latter could be interpreted by the American public as a threat to intervene militarily.

Nixon responded angrily: “Goddamn it, I’ve got a responsibility to protect American lives. I’m going to do it.” Nixon apparently said he was prepared to use the carrier force to protect U.S. citizens in East Pakistan, who numbered two hundred.

Kissinger: “Nobody will believe it. The Indians will scream we’re threatening them.”

Nixon: “Why are we doing it anyway? Aren’t we going in for the purpose of strength?”

Kissinger saw Nixon’s determination to use the carrier. “I’d move the carrier so that we can tell the Chinese tomorrow to move their forces to the frontier,” Kissinger said, adding that a decision to move the carrier group into the Bay of Bengal meant that “we’d have to do a lot of things, and we’d have to do them toughly.”

Nixon: “I understand.”

Kissinger: “We’d have to get the Indian ambassador called in and demand assurances against annexation. We’d have to leak at that moment that secret understanding to protect the Indians [Pakistanis] against aggression.”

Nixon: “I understand.” He then asked Kissinger “to get the whole thing together.”

Turning to the political impact of using the carrier, Kissinger noted that it would take six days to move the carrier from Southeast Asia to the Bay of Bengal, by which time Congress would have already been out for a recess. He said he would talk to Admiral Moorer “to see whether we can keep the carrier back of the Bay of Bengal”.

Nixon: “Then can we move the other helicopter thing in?”

Kissinger said yes.

On 12 December, Moorer informed Kissinger that the plan was to move the carrier through the Malacca Straits separating Malaysia and Indonesia. The carrier force that had been stationed off Vietnam was expected to traverse on

12 December morning, Washington time. The force was anticipated to arrive off East Pakistan by 16 December morning and then on to the Indian Ocean. “In forty-five hours they can move where we want them. It’s a carrier, four destroyers, an oiler and amphibious force [the Tripoli] with three destroyers – all set to go at daylight Monday [13 December], their time.”

Kissinger: “Send it where there are Americans – say, Karachi.” He said the Pentagon could comment “that they were sent to help in a possible evacuation.”

Irwin: “Will we announce it?”

Kissinger: “Wait for a question from the press.”

## **Nixon Moves Seventh Fleet To Bluff Soviets**

When Kissinger met with Nixon in the Oval Office, he did not recommend sending the carrier, fearing public backlash in the United States, although he suggested sending a helicopter ship and some escorts.

“From the Chinese angle, I would like to move the carrier. From the public opinion angle, what would the press and television do to us if an American carrier showed up there?” the national security adviser asked.

Nixon asked: “Can’t the carrier be there for the purpose of evacuation?”

Kissinger responded: “But against whom are we going to use the planes? Are we going to shoot our way in?”

Nixon asked what good it would do to move a helicopter ship into the area.

Kissinger said it would be “a token that something else will come afterward”.

Kissinger told Nixon that the White House and the State Department were following different approaches to the crisis. He said the State Department “would propose a ceasefire in the west in return for in effect our recognition of Bangladesh,” and added that such an approach would constitute “a total collapse” and “it would hurt us with the Chinese.”

Nixon, however, felt it was necessary to take into account the “realities” of the situation. “The partition of Pakistan is a fact. You see those people welcoming the Indian troops when they come in. Why then are we going through all of this agony?” the president asked.

Kissinger replied: “We are going through this agony to prevent the West Pakistan army from being destroyed. And secondly, to retain our Chinese arm. And thirdly, to prevent a complete collapse of the world’s psychological balance of power, which will be produced if a combination of the Soviet Union and the Soviet armed client state can tackle a not insignificant country without anybody doing anything.”

Kissinger felt that if the United States would “put enough chips into the pot” it could persuade the Soviets “for their own reasons, for the other considerations, to call a halt to it”.

Nixon: "What are we going to ask the Russians to do?"

Kissinger: "Ceasefire, negotiation, and subsequent withdrawal."

"But," he added, "we'd have to clear it with Yahya first."

Nixon: "Ceasefire and negotiation on what basis?"

Kissinger: "Between the Awami League and Islamabad on the basis of the December 1970 election," and "within the framework of a united Pakistan." Withdrawal, he said, would occur after the negotiations.

To Nixon's question about what the United States could do to influence the outcome, Kissinger replied: "I would keep open the possibility that we'll pour arms into Pakistan." If the Soviet Union could ship arms to India, Kissinger did not see why the United States could not supply arms to Pakistan. "I don't understand the theory of non-involvement. I don't see where we will be as a country. I have to tell you honestly I consider this our Rhineland."

He warned: "If the Russians come out of it totally cocky, we may have a Middle East war in the spring."

Nixon expressed concerns about adopting a hard line. "We have to know what we are jeopardizing," he said.

Kissinger: "You are jeopardizing your relationship with the Soviets, but that is also your card, your willingness to jeopardize it." Not to play that card, would be to concede the Soviet Union a dangerous victory, he added.

Nixon observed that opponents of his policy towards South Asia were also concerned about jeopardizing United States relations with India.

Kissinger said: "You could argue that it will help us in the long-term with the Indians."

Nixon replied: "I don't give a damn about the Indians."

Nixon then asked how the transfer of planes from Jordan to Pakistan could be facilitated.

Kissinger: The United States could tell "the King to move his planes and inform us that he has done it." Then the White House would instruct the State Department "to shut up". He said America would tell Jordan that it was illegal, but if he did it "we'll keep things under control."

Nixon: "All right, that's the way we play that."

India's ambassador met with Irwin on 14 December to express concern about reports that the United States sent a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, equipped with "all kinds of devices and gadgets" to evacuate the Americans. New Delhi instructed him to seek assurance from Washington that there would be no evacuation operation without prior agreement with India or by force. Sisco said he would report what Jha had said.

Jha said he had also seen a report from New Delhi that America had some plan or intention to establish a beachhead in Bangladesh to evacuate the Americans or help transfer the Pakistanis to West Pakistan. Any such attempt would endanger long-term Indo-U.S. relations, he cautioned.

Sisco said he had seen the report, but was personally unaware of any such plan. He said that if he had anything further, he would be back in touch. Sisco said that although he did not wish to go into past history, the Americans did see in Indian actions things that "not only reflect the present strains in our relations but also which obviously could have implications for our long-term relations, which both sides will be looking at in the future."

On 9 December, Soviet Agriculture Minister Vladimir Matskevich came to Washington. Nixon met with him and Vorontsov at Kissinger's recommendation. Kissinger saw Matskevich's presence as an opportunity to send a high-level message to the Soviet leadership that if India turned its military on West Pakistan after defeating the forces in East Pakistan, it would create a crisis of the utmost gravity.

Nixon told the Soviet leader that while India's victory over Pakistan might provide short-term gain for Moscow and New Delhi against Islamabad and Beijing, it would poison the whole new relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. The question remained: "Are short-term gains for India worth jeopardizing Soviet relations with the United States?"

"This is not conveyed in a threatening way," the president stressed. "It would be difficult, however, for the United States to stand by if the Indians moved forces into West Pakistan. The key to a settlement was in the hands of the Soviet Union. If the Soviets did not restrain the Indians, it would be difficult for Washington to deal with Yahya."

"If the Indians continue military operations, we must inevitably look toward a confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States. The Soviet Union has a treaty with India, but the United States has obligations to Pakistan," Nixon told Matskevich.

He proposed that there be a ceasefire first, followed by political negotiations "within a Pakistan framework."

After the president's meeting with the Soviet leader, Nixon and Kissinger assessed the conversation. Nixon was pleased with the exchange. "I really stuck it to him," the president said.

Kissinger predicted: "It will end now. It will end. We will lose 70 percent but that's a hell of a lot better. We were losing 110 percent yesterday." Nixon felt that, at a minimum, his initiative with Matskevich would have the effect of stopping "the goddamn Indians from going to the West".

The Soviet Union responded to Nixon's message on 12 December saying Gandhi personally assured Moscow that "India has no intention to take any military actions against West Pakistan. The Soviet leaders believe that this makes the situation easier and hope that the government of Pakistan will draw from this appropriate conclusions."

On 12 December, Nixon met again with Kissinger in the White House to discuss a message just received from Moscow, which was conveyed by Vorontsov to Haig. Kissinger told Nixon the Russians had an assurance from Gandhi that she would not attack West Pakistan and that they were then working with her to arrange a ceasefire.

Nixon commented: "We must not be in a position where the Russians and we settle the son-of-a-bitch and leave the Chinese out."

Turning to the decision made in the morning to confront the Soviet Union militarily if necessary in support of China, Kissinger said: "What you did this morning Mr. President was a heroic act."

Nixon responded: "I had to do it." He said the prevailing instinct in the government was to avoid difficult choices: "It's the whole attitude, the whole government, the whole American establishment would say, well don't borrow trouble. It's all going to work out. Nothing ever works out unless you do something about it. That's the trouble with the world."

Referring to the appeasement of Hitler before World War II, he ascribed the war to the "pusillanimous" conduct of the Western allies.

Kissinger: "When I showed Vorontsov the Kennedy treaty they knew they were looking down the gun barrel."

Nixon asked: "Did he react?"

Kissinger replied: "Oh yeah." It was time "to turn the screw another half turn".

He said that if the United States was to ease up on the pressure on India and the Soviet Union, "we've had it." "Therefore," he added, "my strong recommendation is that we trigger this U.N. thing as quickly as we possibly can because it is the only way we can go on the record now of condemning India."

Nixon concurred: "That's right."

Kissinger felt that it was essential that the condemnation be leveled initially in a White House statement. Kissinger put forward a draft of such a statement and Nixon approved it.

Kissinger was confident that events were moving in the right direction: "We've got them. But the big problem now is, Mr. President, not to give the — is to — [sic] if we play this thing well we'll come out ahead with both the Chinese and the Russians." He went on: "We are doing this Mr. President with no cards whatsoever."

Nixon felt he had one card: "The Russians want something from us."

The optimism engendered by the Soviet response was tempered, near the end of the conversation, by the fact that the crisis still could take a dangerous turn.

Kissinger said: "The Chinese may come anyway and we'll have to face the Russians down anyway."

Nixon responded: "Yeah, but if the Russians and the Chinese come now they will come." He then added: "Now there is one great problem. As I said, I may be wrong, but Communists generally use negotiations for the purpose of screwing, not for the purpose of settling."

Kissinger felt that the Soviets were "too scared" to play a devious game with the negotiations. He referred again to the Kennedy commitment to Pakistan as convincing Vorontsov that the United States "meant business." Kissinger felt that the Soviet Union was not ready for a military confrontation with the United States. "In '73-'74 they may have you. They're not ready yet."

Nixon and Kissinger then drafted a response to the message just received from the Soviet Union. They continued to work on what was sent subsequently as a hotline response. Kissinger concluded from the Soviet message that there won't be military action against West Pakistan. He and Nixon discussed and revised the message according to Nixon's instructions. Nixon said the message should stress that "time is of the essence to avoid frightening consequences neither of us want."

Nixon then reverted to the public statement the White House would issue in condemnation of India. He said "the argument against putting it to the Indians is, as you know, that well if we put it to the Indians then they will stiffen their backs and say screw you."

Kissinger interjected: "They won't."

Nixon said he felt that the Indians seemed to be affected by world opinion. "To the extent that they are goddamn it [sic] we're going to get it across that world opinion is against them."

On 9 December, Kissinger prepared a memo for Nixon for a meeting of senior officials implementing the U.S. policies. It was "to instill the necessary discipline within the bureaucracy and the forum of the Washington Special Action Group to insure compliance with your policies on South Asia".

Kissinger told the president, "Our policy and the policy of the United States government is to undertake those practical steps which are necessary to prevent the dismemberment and defeat of Pakistan as a result of Indian military action supported and abetted by the Soviet Union. There should be no mistake that Pakistan's collapse and dismemberment would result in a major setback for U.S. interests worldwide and, in this context, the United States is indeed involved in the situation in South Asia."

He suggested that Nixon instruct Johnson to call in India's ambassador and ask him "whether India will attempt, as a result of military operations in West Pakistan, to annex or in any other way to occupy and permanently hold territories which are now under Pakistani sovereignty." Johnson should tell Jha that "any attempt to do so would be taken most seriously in Washington."

In addition, the Joint Chiefs chairman should also be told "to undertake immediate actions under the pretext of prudent contingency measures to move a carrier task force, including an amphibious ship with helicopters to the Indian Ocean with movement to commence immediately.

Moreover, Kissinger suggested that Nixon issue an order that if India did not give "a satisfactory response," that the Pentagon should be ready by 9 a.m. with "specific recommendations for additional military actions which might be undertaken to convey the U.S. determination".

Kissinger, meanwhile, passed on Brezhnev's message through the backchannel to Farland, instructing the ambassador to give it to Yahya directly — and not to share it with any bureaucrats. Kissinger outlined that the Soviet leader's proposal for an immediate ceasefire to be followed by political negotiations had several advantages for Pakistan: it would gain Islamabad time and preclude the possibility of the Pakistani army's destruction. If hostilities resumed, India would be much worse internationally and the Pakistan forces would have had a breathing spell. It committed the Soviet Union not to recognize Bangladesh, indicating a measure of the Soviet Union's disassociation from India.

Pakistan's ambassador met with Sisco on 9 December and made an urgent appeal for military aid, invoking the pact between Pakistan and the United States. "We depend on you entirely," Raza said. He understood the U.S. could not provide manpower but that it could offer arms, either directly or indirectly via third countries. Raza expressed hope America would respond promptly.

Sisco assured Raza, "We will give this matter our active consideration."

Raza reiterated his appeal on 10 December, this time to Johnson. Using non-diplomatic and blunt language, the ambassador said the United States had let his country down in the past by trying to adopt a neutral stance between Pakistan and India, a reference to the Johnson administration's policy during the 1965 war. He hoped Washington would not do the same again.

Washington was unsure how to respond to Pakistan's appeal. It sought Farland's input, who advised that Washington obtain as accurate a reading as possible of Indian intentions beyond the East Pakistan conflict, before framing a response. He noted that Islamabad believed India wanted to crush Pakistan's entire military machine, both in East and West Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Keating reported to the State Department about his 8 December talks with India's Defense Secretary, K.B. Lall. Lall said the East

Pakistan conflict should be brought to an end as soon as possible to avoid a humanitarian crisis. India wished to avoid further casualties. If there was an orderly takeover, he promised, India would safeguard the Biharis and the Punjabis in East Pakistan. Lall also assured that the Pakistani prisoners would be protected according to provisions of the Geneva Convention. Washington welcomed Lall's remarks.

On 10 December, Jha met with the State Department officials to explain the latest situation. Irwin asked if the ambassador could assure him India would not annex any territory, including any part of Azad Kashmir. He made clear that he spoke with particular reference to West Pakistan.

Jha said India had recognized Bangladesh. It would not annex the East, nor would it have what he termed a "protectorate relationship" with Bangladesh. In the West, India had no territorial annexation plan. However, he had no clear idea about Azad Kashmir, either and needed to ask Delhi. He promised to be in touch with the United States as soon as possible. If the Bangladesh fighting could be sorted out quickly, Jha said India would seek early normalization. He said this was only his personal speculation; he would have to report to his government to get its official views.

Armed with information from New Delhi, Jha told Irwin two days later that India had no war aims; it did not want war and did not start it. India clearly did not covet Pakistan's territory. India was anxious to see Bangladesh remaining completely independent. On Kashmir, he said it belonged to India. Pakistan illegally held parts of it, but India opposed changing the situation by force.

Irwin asked about India's future control over East Pakistan. Jha had no firm answer. Later in the conversation, however, he said that one way to ensure Bangladesh would not be controlled by India was for it to join the United Nations in its own right. "India does not want Bangladesh to become an Indian protectorate and was anxious not to have control over it," Jha reiterated.

As Jha discussed the war with Irwin, on 10 December, the U.S. consulate general in Dhaka forwarded a report to the State Department that U.N. Special Assistant Paul Marc Henry had received from General Farman Ali Khan. General Farman Ali also forwarded a copy to Yahya for approval for the United Nations to arrange an immediate ceasefire in East Pakistan.

Yahya approved Farman's proposal, stipulating safe passage and repatriation of the Pakistani forces to West Pakistan. It was not a surrender offer. Farman Ali's message indicated that if the offer was rejected, the Pakistani forces would fight "to the last man".

Farman Ali later told a Pakistani war commission looking into the 1971 setback that East Pakistan's governor told him to draft the message. Farman handed over a copy of the proposal as directed by the governor, who had been authorized by Yahya to offer proposals for a political settlement with the Awami League. In his authorization, according to the commission, Yahya clearly instructed Niazi that "the question of surrender of armed forces would not be considered and does not arise."

Yahya was warned by Malik, according to his information, that the Indian army intended to kill all West Pakistanis in East Pakistan, both military and civilian. He and his cabinet felt that Pakistan had to accept any ceasefire terms that would prevent a massacre in East Pakistan.

The war commission concluded: "If General Yahya Khan, as commander-in-chief of the army, had shown greater determination and courage and directed the Eastern Command to hold on somewhat longer than the 16th of December, 1971, it was quite possible that a satisfactory solution ordering a ceasefire might have been obtained from the Security Council." Yahya later went back on this proposal based on false hope that China would intervene in support of Pakistan.

In Washington, Kissinger told Nixon that according to a clandestine report from Islamabad, Yahya had told his prime minister designate, Nurul Amin, on 11 December, that the Chinese ambassador in Pakistan had assured him that within seventy-two hours, the Chinese army would move toward the Northeast Frontier Agency border. But the CIA had received no information of unusual activity by the Chinese forces in Tibet.

The Pakistani forces eagerly waited for the promised help and continued to regroup to defend Dhaka. No one came to their rescue, however, and they were far outnumbered by their Indian counterparts. Compared with the 30,000 or more Pakistanis, India had roughly 60,000 men in three divisions moving towards the city, with at least as many more in reserve near East Pakistan's borders. The guerrillas were also poised outside the city.

In the West, fighting in the Kashmir and Punjab areas continued with little significant movement by either side. In the southern sector on the western front, the Indians were some thirty miles inside Pakistan's Sind province. If the Indians pressed towards Hyderabad, Pakistan had to divert forces from the north to prevent Karachi from being cut off from the rest of the country.

In Washington, Kissinger told Nixon's foreign policy team on 10 December that "the president doesn't want us to move in the United Nations to arrange a surrender." When one aide described the situation as "hopeless", Kissinger insisted, "We don't want to be the instrument pushing a Pakistani surrender, when the Chinese are on their side." He also advised Sisco to ensure Farland not to press Pakistan on this. "We don't want our ambassador to press Yahya to surrender." Sisco assured that "there is no danger of that. Farland wouldn't do that."

The day the State Department received the ceasefire message from Dhaka, Kissinger told a meeting of senior officials that Washington should call for a ceasefire in the West. "It must be clearly understood that our policy is to get a ceasefire in the West. We'll make a treaty, if necessary."

Sisco: "Let's tell Yahya in a message that this is what we plan to do, and does he agree?"

Kissinger: "If there is a ceasefire now, we don't have to worry about the territorial question in the West."

Based on the decision the senior officials made during the meeting, the State Department sent a telegram to Farland asking him to verify the authenticity of Farman's message to the U.N. representative in Dhaka. Washington also asked Farland to ask Yahya whether he wanted a ceasefire in the West as well. Farland replied, "You will be receiving flash instructions through regular channels concerning Pakistani proposal for immediate ceasefire."

During a conversation with Kissinger on 10 December, Nixon asked whether the carriers were moving towards the Bay of Bengal as he had instructed. Kissinger assured him that "everything is moving." Kissinger also reported, "Four Jordanian planes have already moved to Pakistan, twenty-two more are coming. We're talking to the Saudis. The Turks we've now found are willing to give five."

Nixon then asked what Kissinger planned to discuss with the Chinese later in the day.

Kissinger: "I'm going to tell them what forces we're moving."

Nixon: "Could you say it would be very helpful if they could move some forces, or threaten to move some forces?"

Kissinger: "Absolutely."

Nixon: "They've got to threaten or they've got to move, one of the two. You know what I mean?"

Kissinger replied: "Yeah."

Nixon: "Threaten to move forces or move them, Henry, that's what they must do now. Now, goddammit, we're playing our role and that will restrain India. And also tell them this will help us get the ceasefire."

He indicated that he did not want to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union that China would reject. Kissinger agreed: "If we stay strong, even if it comes out badly, we'll have come out well with the Chinese, which is important."

Nixon: "Coming back to this India-Pakistan thing, have we got anything else we can do?"

Kissinger: "I think we're going to crack it now."

Nixon: "Well, the Indians will be warned by the Chinese, right?"

Kissinger: "Well, I'll have to find out tonight."

Nixon: "You do your best, Henry. This should have been done long ago. The Chinese have not warned the Indians. They haven't warned them that they're going to come in. And that's the point, they've got to warn them . . . All they've got to do is move something. Move their, move a division. You know, move some trucks. Fly some planes. You know, some symbolic act. We're not doing a goddamn thing, Henry, you know that. We're just moving things around, aren't we?"

Kissinger agreed: "Yeah."

Nixon: "These Indians are cowards, right?"

Kissinger: "Right, but with Russian backing. You see the Russians have sent notes to Iran, Turkey, to a lot of countries threatening them. The Russians have played a miserable game."

Looking ahead, Nixon asked whether the United States should recognize the emerging political reality in East Pakistan. "What do we do about that? Are we going to just say . . . Indian occupation or Bangladesh? Or what? Are we going to oppose the Bangladesh recognition? What's our position? Is anybody involved on these things?"

Kissinger responded: "After the Brezhnev letter came yesterday, we sent a copy of it to Yahya . . . And now Yahya has come back with a proposal saying ceasefire, negotiations for mutual withdrawal, and negotiations to settle the political future . . . And then what will happen on Bangladesh, Mr. President, is that whatever West Pakistan and these people work out we will accept. But we will not be in the fore, in the front."

Nixon: "Whatever West Pakistan works out with whom?"

Kissinger: "The negotiations on East Pakistan."

Nixon: "But India will not agree to negotiations on East Pakistan."

Kissinger: "Yeah, but the Russians have already agreed to it. So what will happen, let's be realistic, what will happen is that the representatives of East Pakistan will demand independence. And in practice I think that is what West Pakistan will then agree to. But then it won't be us who have done it. This will solve the problem of do we recognize Bangladesh against the wishes of the Pakistan Government."

Nixon: "We must never recognize Bangladesh . . . until West Pakistan gives us the go ahead."

Kissinger told Nixon on 10 December that "the war in the East has reached its final stages." He said the Indian forces had encircled Dhaka and were preparing for the final assault if the Pakistan forces in the capital refused to surrender.

Pakistan forces' resistance elsewhere in the province appeared on the verge of total collapse, although they continued to hold some isolated areas. Faced with this desperate situation, the top Pakistan military official in Dacca had called on the United States to arrange: (a) peaceful transfer of power to the "elected representatives of East Pakistan"; (b) an immediate ceasefire; (c) repatriation of the Pakistani forces to West Pakistan; (d) repatriation of all other West Pakistani personnel who desire to leave; (e) the safety of the others settled in East Pakistan since 1947; and (f) a guarantee of no reprisals.

In the West, the Indians seemed to be successfully repulsing Pakistan attacks in Kashmir, but showed no signs yet of initiating a major offensive of their own. In the Lahore and other areas to the north, the Indian air attacks were concentrating more heavily on communications, the power infrastructure and more direct military targets. Some observers thought that the purpose of these heavy air attacks was to soften up West Pakistan for an all-out Indian ground offensive as soon as the situation was under control in the East. There were some unconfirmed reports that the Indians might already be beginning the process of shifting aircraft and troops to the Western front.

On the sea, the Pakistanis had apparently given up trying to contest the approaches to their ports in both the East and West. The Pakistanis, from Yahya on down, were charging that Soviet technicians were aboard the OSA missile boats that had sunk a Pakistani destroyer and attacked the Karachi port area.

Kissinger quoted a reliable clandestine source reporting that Gandhi had said that there were "some indications" that the Chinese intended to intervene militarily. The Indian premier did not reveal her evidence, but reportedly said that the Chinese might create border incidents in the East before the fall of Dhaka and later take some action in the contested Ladakh area near Kashmir.

"So far, we have no evidence that the Chinese are actually planning such actions," Kissinger told Nixon.

## U.S. Gives Soviets Veiled Ultimatum

After a meeting with the Soviet chargé, Yuli Vorontsov, on 10 December, Kissinger reported to Nixon that the Soviets clearly understood America's resolve. He had underlined the significance of the understanding President John F. Kennedy had with President Ayub Khan in 1962 about helping Pakistan. The Agreement of Cooperation signed by the United States and Pakistan on 5 March 1959, stipulated that in case of aggression against Pakistan the United States would "take such appropriate action, including the use of armed forces, as may be mutually agreed upon" to help Pakistan at its request.

On 26 January 1962, President Kennedy reaffirmed America's commitment in a letter to President Ayub: "As a firm ally, Pakistan is entitled to the re-affirmation you have requested of the prior assurances given by the United States to Pakistan on the subject of aggression against Pakistan. My government certainly stands by these assurances."

"I showed him the secret treaty. I said now I hope you understand the significance of this. It isn't just an obligation. It will completely defuse the Democrats because they are not going to attack their own President. So I said when the President yesterday spoke of an obligation he was

speaking of a Kennedy obligation.”

The Soviet diplomat assured Kissinger that within an hour this message would be on Brezhnev’s desk. “And, I told him we’re moving some military forces, but it will not be visible until Sunday night . . . In effect, it was giving him sort of veiled ultimatum.”

Kissinger then predicted a ceasefire resolution to be approved in three days – on 12 December or 13 December. He said: “I think that the Russians will agree with us to call for one.” The Chinese would accept such a proposal, he assured Nixon, “because we’ve got Yahya. What we are proposing to the Russians, Yahya gave us.”

Nixon had written to Brezhnev on 10 December, suggesting a ceasefire in the West. “If this does not take place, we would have to conclude that there is in progress an act of aggression directed at the whole of Pakistan, a friendly country toward which we have obligations,” Nixon told Brezhnev. Nixon proposed an immediate joint appeal by Moscow and Washington for a complete ceasefire.

Kissinger was to meet with Vorontsov at 11:58 a.m. He outlined a modified U.S. proposal for a settlement. It no longer called for a withdrawal of Indian forces, but stipulated a ceasefire and standstill agreement to be monitored by U.N. representatives in Pakistan’s both wings. After the ceasefire, negotiations were to take place for troop withdrawals and the satisfaction of Bengali aspirations. Kissinger also conveyed to Vorontsov the text of Nixon’s letter sent to Brezhnev on 10 December. Kissinger briefed Nixon on the meeting shortly thereafter, saying Vorontsov needed no further proof of U.S. resolve.

“We got the message loud and clear from the president yesterday,” Kissinger quoted Vorontsov as saying, adding, “I can tell you informally that if they are not working through the night now in Moscow, they are not doing their duty.”

Nixon said: “If Brezhnev does not have the good judgment not to push us to the wall on this miserable issue . . . we just may as well forget the summit.” Kissinger’s judgment was that “by Sunday night or Monday” [12-13 December] there would be an acceptable ceasefire. He said: “I think that the Russians will agree with us to call for one.” The Chinese would accept such a proposal, he assured Nixon, “because we’ve got Yahya. What we are proposing to the Russians, Yahya gave us.”

On 13 December, the day Moscow vetoed for the third time an American resolution at the Security Council for a ceasefire, the Soviet Union informed the White House via the hotline that “we are conducting a clarification of all the circumstances in India. We will inform you of the results of the clarification without delay.” A handwritten note on the message indicated Haig received it at 5 a.m. and transmitted the text to Kissinger at 7:37 a.m. “Obviously, we are still in a holding pattern,” Haig commented in his note.

In Islamabad, the U.S. ambassador met with Yahya in his residence at 10 a.m. on 10 December, and conveyed to him Kissinger’s message regarding the proposed ceasefire. Yahya initially indicated he did not understand exactly what was implied by the message conveyed. After Farland reiterated salient points, Yahya still indicated strong objections, because “Russia is giving India everything she wants.”

Farland then undertook the hardest “sell job” of his life. “After about thirty minutes, I brought Yahya around to a point where he was making his own proposition.” Except for the slightly different wording.

Yahya proposed, according to Farland’s message to Kissinger, that India and Pakistan agree to an immediate ceasefire, “and that the United Nations provide observers to monitor it. Yahya also proposed that India and Pakistan immediately begin talks to settle the war and withdraw troops, while entering discussion toward a political solution in East Pakistan.”

Kissinger sent word back to Farland that the United States would ask the Soviet Union to join Washington in the ceasefire Yahya approved. He instructed Farland to tell Yahya that Pakistan should refrain from making additional proposals until America had the opportunity to move within the above framework.

Kissinger also asked Farland to inform Yahya that Nixon “has made the strongest démarche to the Soviets and included warning to them that we have obligations towards Pakistan, which will not permit aggression against West Pakistan.”

## “Balkanize” West Pakistan: Why Gandhi Backed Off

As the Indian military marched into East Pakistan, full throttle, and international efforts to stop the fighting gained momentum at the United Nations, Gandhi found herself between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, if she advanced her campaign to completely crush the Pakistani military in the West as she had promised to her cabinet months earlier, she would face a potential fight with Washington and Beijing and antagonize Moscow, which had wanted to end the war after capturing Dhaka. On the other hand, if she backed off, her colleagues would give her a hard time and India would lose a rare opportunity to permanently cripple an arch enemy.

On 10 December, Gandhi explained to her cabinet that if India accepted the U.N. ceasefire proposal after the Bangladesh liberation, it could avoid further complications with the United States and “might also rule out the current possibility of a Chinese intervention in Ladakh.”

India’s Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram and several other military leaders, however, opposed a ceasefire until India had taken certain unspecified areas of Kashmir and destroyed “the war mechanism of Pakistan”.

Gandhi overruled the opponents, saying that “for the moment India would not categorically reject” the U.N. ceasefire proposal. India would accept a ceasefire after the Awami League regime was installed in Dhaka.

Many Indian parliament members, both from her own party as well as the opposition, were unhappy with Gandhi’s decision, apparently unaware of the international pressure she faced to quickly end the war. They wanted India to capture at least Azad Kashmir and Lahore.

Jagjivan Ram, when criticized eventually for the ceasefire, told parliament that the prime minister was the one responsible for such a decision. He, however, refused to go publicly against her decision. When the members pressed him on capturing Azad Kashmir, he simply responded: “Enough is enough.”

Gandhi’s decision to abruptly halt the campaign short of her desired goal was not a pleasant one to herself, either. “Madame Gandhi said she couldn’t forgive her father for leaving Baluchistan out of India, because it was in India’s ‘historic sphere,’” Kissinger recalled during a conversation in the Oval Office with the Shah of Iran on 15 May 1975. If she could not undo her father’s historic mistake, she said, she could at least blunt its effect by turning Baluchistan into a neutral country, one that would not pose a security threat to India as a united West Pakistan would.

Gandhi’s decision resulted from strong pressure from Moscow, which incorrectly perceived that Nixon meant business when he dispatched the naval fleet into the Bay of Bengal. In fact, the United States later took credit for saving West Pakistan from disintegration by sending the Seventh Fleet, which the Americans believed scared both the Soviet Union and India.

“We believe and we have very strong confirmation that those steps were effective in convincing the Soviet Union to influence the Indians to accept a ceasefire rather than to proceed with attacks against West Pakistan – in other words, to stop short of what had been their goal against Pakistan,” General Alexander Haig Jr., senior military adviser to Kissinger, told Chou En-lai in Beijing on 3 January 1972.

The Soviet Union told India that it would accept the ceasefire as soon as Bangladesh was liberated. Gandhi told the cabinet that Moscow was “concerned about the possibility of a Chinese intervention”. Moscow was also feeling the U.S. pressure to bring the war to an end.

If China were to enter the conflict, Beijing knew that the Soviet Union would act in the Sinkiang region. The Soviet air support might be made available to India in such a scenario, Gandhi was told.

D.P. Dhar, a Gandhi confidant who negotiated the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty, was in Moscow to discuss the future strategy with the Soviet leaders when Nixon pressed Russia to restrain India. Dhar assured the Soviet Union that India had no plans to annex any West Pakistani territory.

Gandhi initially hesitated to end the war after liberating Bangladesh because of her concern that even if New Delhi halted the campaign, Pakistan might not accept the ceasefire and continue fighting in the West to avenge its loss of East Pakistan. Pakistan’s strategy might have involved breaking through the Chhamb area, with the Chinese support in Ladakh, in a bid to cut off the Kashmir Valley.

In that case, Gandhi said, the Soviet Union would attempt to convince the United States to accept Bangladesh as a “fait accompli” in the hope that America would prevail upon Pakistan to accept a ceasefire with an independent Bangladesh. It was even possible that despite its anti-India stance, China might advise Pakistan to acknowledge the reality that is Bangladesh.

Gandhi concluded her briefing by saying that India would emerge from the war as the dominant power in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. China would respect India and might even decide to improve relations with New Delhi. On the other hand, Pakistan would lose its economic power to support a large military complex. The current Pakistani military leadership would not survive the defeat. Gandhi expected China and the United States to lose interest in Pakistan, and she foresaw a greater pressure for autonomy in Pakistan’s Northwest Frontier, Baluchistan and the Sind provinces. She hoped a new democratic Pakistan, based on autonomous republics, would emerge, which would desire to be friendly to India.

In Washington, the White House received a letter from Brezhnev that the Soviet charge had dropped by on 9 December at 8:15 a.m. Nixon had written to Brezhnev three days earlier asking the Soviet Union to influence India to stop the war. Haig, who transmitted a message to Kissinger along with the letter, felt the Soviets deliberately delayed replying to Nixon to ensure the Pakistani forces collapsed in the East. Moscow did not refer to Bangladesh or independence in the letter, but had set criteria to have that effect.

“I see no reference in the official Soviet response to the unofficial language used by Vorontsov with you on Sunday, which referred to a one-Pakistan solution when he confirmed that India had no designs on West Pakistan,” Haig told Kissinger. “Under the formula underlined by the Soviets, therefore, we have the advantage of a guarantee of preserving West Pakistan, but, at the same time, it is apparent that the Soviets will insist on conditions in the East, which will be tantamount to the creation of an independent East Pakistan.

“At best,” Haig continued, “we can assume that we have an arrangement which will preserve West Pakistan intact, but it will unquestionably fall short of what will be an acceptable arrangement in the East to either the government of Pakistan or the People’s Republic of China.”

Brezhnev reiterated Moscow's position in detail in this letter.

"We stated to President Yahya Khan and the Pakistani government that the only way to proceed is the way of political settlement, and that a political settlement requires political means. Also, we repeatedly laid emphasis on the essence of the problem to be solved."

It was clear all along that it would be impossible to get the refugees to return home without a political settlement. That was why Moscow advised Yahya to speedily take that path.

"Unfortunately, President Yahya Khan and his government did not take our advice. We are still puzzled as to the reason why the Pakistani leadership did not want to follow the way of political settlement – the way of negotiations. But the fact remains that they preferred to conduct the affairs in such a way as to make the guns speak and the bloodshed.

"The thing to do now is to stop the war already underway. This requires a ceasefire. But the question arises – what is the best way to achieve it?" he asked, adding that the logical answer would possibly be "a political settlement, based on the recognition of the will of the East Pakistani population."

"Otherwise it is impossible to ensure the respect for the lawful rights and interests of the people of East Pakistan and to create conditions for the return of the millions of refugees. Without it a ceasefire will not be stable. You already know about this proposal of ours, i.e. to solve together and simultaneously both questions – of ceasefire and of immediate resumption of negotiations between the government of Pakistan and the East Pakistani leaders concerning a political settlement in East Pakistan. Those negotiations should, naturally, be started from the stage at which they were discontinued. We feel that this proposal provides a way out for all, including Pakistan. On the other hand, all would lose – and Pakistan maybe even more than others – on the way of continuing the war and rejecting a political settlement."

Kissinger briefed Nixon on Brezhnev's letter less than two hours after he received it.

"They're proposing a ceasefire and a political negotiation between Islamabad and the Awami League." He characterized the proposals as "old" and added that although the letter was "very conciliatory" it was still "in itself unacceptable".

He proposed a response: "If this negotiation is within the framework of a united Pakistan, with maximum autonomy for the East, we are willing to discuss it with them. That will separate them to some extent from the Indians. And, secondly, it will get us a ceasefire in the West, which we've got to have if the West Pakistanis aren't to be smashed."

The same day, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, a member of the National Security Council staff, prepared an analysis of Brezhnev's response, saying the Soviet proposal "can have no other effect than the dismemberment of Pakistan". It had "no reference to withdrawal of forces".

He dismissed the proposal to resume negotiations between Yahya and the "East Pakistani leaders" as without merit, given that India had already recognized a separate government in East Bengal. "In fact, I think this proposal is a phony – and the Soviets either know it or the news has not caught up with them. I do not see how Yahya will negotiate with anybody in East Pakistan when the place is practically occupied by India; and I do not see how the East Pakistanis will negotiate with Yahya when they see victory in their grasp."

He suggested that instead of sending another letter to Brezhnev, Nixon should discuss this matter with visiting Soviet minister Matskevich and Kissinger should talk with Vorontsov to supplement the president's message. He proposed that the United States demand "there must be categorical guarantees that the Soviets will not support the dismemberment of Pakistan, de facto or de jure; there must be a ceasefire, there must be convincing evidence that the Soviets are working to restrain the Indians, in word and deed."

When Haig sent the analysis to Kissinger, he said Sonnenfeldt would draft talking points for the president along foregoing lines, but "he will soften conditions and language in recognition of our weak position and diplomatic niceties."

On 11 December, Kissinger summarized the latest developments in South Asia in a memo to Nixon. "Pakistan late yesterday revised the proposal reported here yesterday morning from Dacca for a ceasefire, repatriation of the Pakistani troops and a transfer of power to the elected representatives of East Pakistan. The revised proposal contains only a call for ceasefire and guaranteed safety of the military and civilian personnel; there is no reference to a political settlement or the withdrawal of the Pakistani troops."

The diplomatic effort, he said, stood still, while Bhutto, who was in New York, awaited instructions from Islamabad. Bhutto told Bush he had arrived to find conflicting instructions and was seeking a clarification. Indicating a division within the Pakistani government, Bhutto said the first proposal had "flabbergasted" him and that if it remained the government's policy he would take the first plane home and not be shackled by it.

The first proposal, according to Pakistan's U.N. ambassador, had been drafted by a field commander under great strain and it contained "such unprecedented requests as asking the United Nations to effect a transfer of power" to the Awami League.

Kissinger met in New York with Bhutto, Raza and Shahi, on the day he spoke with Nixon. After that meeting, the Americans concluded that Kissinger's ceasefire proposal had been overtaken by events and was too complicated to succeed at the United Nations. Now they decided that Pakistan would obtain third-country support to introduce a Security Council resolution that would include both ceasefire and withdrawal. But such a resolution was likely to be vetoed, which would lead Washington to move to accept a simple ceasefire without any linkage to the Soviet formulation of political negotiation.

Kissinger instructed Farland to urgently meet with Yahya to explain the new strategy.

Farland reported on 12 December that Yahya "expressed his full accord with the procedures suggested" by Kissinger. The military ruler indicated that Shahi would be instructed accordingly.

In the evening, Kissinger told Nixon he had talked with Bhutto, who said the Chinese had assured him "they were willing to do something and, in fact, I think that they are going to do something, but they said that they had their doubts about us."

"They just don't think that we are firm and they want some word from us what we're going to do, if the Russians press them. Of course, you know, I couldn't help Bhutto," Kissinger said.

Kissinger also told Nixon that Indian military advances in East Pakistan remained virtually unchecked outside Dhaka. The Pakistani troops retreated in a disorderly fashion. Even in Dhaka, where many of the survivors seemed to be holding up, morale was low amongst both officers and enlisted men. The Indian forces were consolidating for the final thrust at the capital city, in the event that ceasefire efforts failed.

On the Western front, the largest tank battles took place in Kashmir. Gandhi's staff said that as soon as the East Pakistan situation was settled, India would begin a major offensive against West Pakistan. India hoped to end all major fighting by that month's end.

In New Delhi, meanwhile, reports were circulating that the Seventh Fleet was moving towards the Bay of Bengal. The Soviets showed no sign



of slackening their support for India. Unconfirmed reports indicated that a Soviet military team would soon visit New Delhi. Potentially more significant was a trip to Moscow by D.P. Dhar, former Indian ambassador to Moscow and a Gandhi confidant. Dhar went to sound out the Soviets on India's intentions towards West Pakistan.

On 12 December, Kissinger gave Nixon another briefing on South Asia, starting out with a message from the U.S. ambassador in Pakistan. Farland reported that Yahya was prepared to do "anything reasonable under the circumstances".

At the United Nations, Bush met with the Indian delegation at the foreign minister's request. During a two-hour conversation, Singh and his entourage [Kaul, Jha, and Sen] said further U.N. debate would only harden positions and create additional frictions. The United Nations was tied to precedent and formalistic rites and could not deal with complex issues. If it had to meet in the future, Bangladesh representatives must be present; such was the reality. Singh explained that India recognized Bangladesh for two purposes: to make clear that India had no territorial ambitions in East Pakistan and to establish a moderate, elected democratic group to control the Mukti Bahini.

Singh said India had no territorial aims in West Pakistan, either, but cautioned that this commitment was not open-ended. If Pakistan continued the war and tried to make gains in the West to compensate for its losses in the East, India's position could change. Singh declined to make the same unequivocal commitment on Azad Kashmir.

Kaul, India's foreign secretary, said, "We have no major ambitions." He noted, however, that even in peacetime, India and Pakistan had talked about minor rectifications in the border. Both Singh and Kaul repeatedly said that they did not wish to prolong the war.

On 12 December at 11:45 a.m., Kissinger told Vorontsov that the moves made by the United States, such as dispatching the Seventh Fleet to the Bay of Bengal and calling a Security Council meeting to implement the General Assembly resolution, were "no longer reversible".

"I want you to understand that. I want us to understand each other," Kissinger told the Soviet diplomat. "We are calling a Security Council meeting to ask for implementation of the General Assembly resolution."

Vorontsov asked, "Do you think that whole situation is that urgent for all these steps? We are talking very actively with the Indians and I think we will have results in several hours."

Kissinger: "We had already given all our instructions. I told you we would move this morning and we didn't get your message till after 10:00 and it could not be reversed."

Vorontsov: "Not because of ill-will but just the timing factor of getting messages to and from Moscow."

Kissinger: "I think this can still be settled on that basis," a reference to the resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire and repatriation of soldiers.

Vorontsov: "I am afraid we will have some trouble in the Security Council. We are thinking of everything together: the ceasefire, status [of the] war, withdrawal of all forces."

Kissinger: "Your communication doesn't mention any of these things."

Vorontsov: "We haven't yet gotten approval of the Indians but we expect it in several hours."

Kissinger: "I think all we need is one more round at the Security Council."

Vorontsov: "Maybe by the time of the Security Council meeting there will be agreement from India. We must cooperate on this matter because we are now on the same track."

Kissinger: "Our greatest desire is to cooperate with you. But when we didn't hear from you I told you that by 9:00 we would move. I told you on Friday I was holding it up for 48 hours. I was hoping to hear something from you last night."

Vorontsov: "Well, maybe everything will fall into place."

Kissinger: "We can still make it fall into place."

Vorontsov: "We need an agreement. I hope you will not be insistent on a fist fight in the Security Council because we are in agreement now. All that is needed now is the tactical things. The terms will be acceptable to you."

Kissinger: "You will find us more than cooperative. Make sure your leaders understand this."

Vorontsov: "I think they understand."

Kissinger: "We had no choice but to do this. We had to stand by our allies. Now we will have gone through the exercise."

Vorontsov: "In the Security Council, Malik might ask to receive instructions since he is waiting for the same thing I am telling you now. If he is trying to stall it is because of this reason, not because he wants to disrupt anything." (Adam Malik was the Soviet envoy to the United Nations.)

Kissinger: "Don't have him introduce it before giving me some advance warning. I am in good communications and if you have a concrete proposal that had a chance of acceptance make it to me first."

Vorontsov: "Maybe by 1:00 we will have something."

Kissinger: "General Haig may go to New York to meet with Bush. In that case call Colonel Kennedy. I will send you right away a copy of the hot line communication." Kissinger ended the call.

A few minutes later, he called Vorontsov again: "Yuli, I just talked to the president again. I reported our conversation to him and he asked me to tell you that we will work it out in a spirit so there are no winners or losers. And so we are not looking for any public humiliation of anybody. We also believe – and we will use our influence in the Security Council as it evolves to come up with a compromise as far as the U.N. is concerned in which everybody gives up a little. We are also prepared to proceed on our understandings on which you are working. We want to make sure that you approach us first so that for now on [sic] we will not take any additional steps beyond what we have told you."

In the evening, Haig phoned Vorontsov to tell him that Kissinger had "asked me to hold up our Seventh Fleet movements, and we are going to put that movement in the orbit for 24 hours at a place so it won't surface – the fact that they are moving."

## **Bhutto, Yahya Offer To Give Power To Mujib**

On 13 December, Kissinger sent a backchannel message to Farland that Bhutto approached Bush in New York with the suggestion that an

amendment to the Security Council resolution be discussed with the Soviets to get a compromise with the Bengalis.

The revised resolution called upon Pakistan to work out "a political settlement in East Pakistan giving an immediate recognition to the will of the East Pakistani population within the framework of one Pakistan".

Kissinger told Farland the revised resolution marked a "departure from the game plan and we are concerned that the introduction of this type of clause, particularly at this point, could lead to a quick dissolution of our position. The Soviets would veto on one-Pakistan grounds and then would be locked into a position on political issue and the hope for quick ceasefire would evaporate. For our part we want to stick with the game plan."

He instructed the ambassador to verify if Bhutto's idea reflected Pakistan's position.

Farland consulted Pakistan's foreign secretary who discussed with Yahya and reported back that, assuming the revised resolution provided for an immediate ceasefire, Yahya approved the amendment proposed by Bhutto. Sultan Khan emphasized the importance of an immediate ceasefire to stop what he characterized as the slaughter in East Pakistan.

On 14 December at 3 a.m., Vorontsov delivered to Haig a handwritten message in English that was apparently prepared in the Soviet Embassy in Washington. Brezhnev sent the message responding to a letter from Nixon.

"The Indian side has expressed the willingness to ceasefire and withdraw its forces if the Pakistani government withdraws its forces from East Pakistan and peaceful settlement is reached there with the lawful representatives of the East Pakistani population to whom the power will be transferred and conditions will be created for return from India of all the East Pakistani refugees. At the same time, the Indians have no intentions to impose their will on the East Pakistani people who themselves will determine their fate," the message said.

It added: "It would be good if the American side on its part also stressed to the Pakistani government the necessity of embarking on the path towards a political settlement in East Pakistan on the basis which is now rather clear," an allusion to the reality on the ground: an independent Bangladesh.

Later in the day, Kissinger held a meeting with Vorontsov, during which he chastized the Soviet Union for the delay in responding to America's communications to the Russian leaders.

Kissinger said that when the crisis in the subcontinent became acute, the United States delayed initiating unilateral action hoping that Washington could work jointly with the Soviet Union for a solution. Specifically for this reason, America held up military moves and other actions that it might otherwise have undertaken. Because of the delay, Washington had taken unilateral actions, such as dispatching the aircraft carrier.

"Further delays of the kind we have been experiencing constitute a temporary irritation in U.S.-Soviet relationships and the remarks on the plane were designed to note the U.S.'s concern. Should the situation continue to deteriorate, it must have an impact on future U.S.-Soviet relationships. Soviet actions thus far are not consistent with the U.S. government's conception of the joint U.S.-Soviet action in search of an improved environment for world peace," he added, alluding to the detente.

Kissinger's comments came after Nixon's remarks to journalists on board Air Force One that the Soviet Union could restrain India. If the Soviets did not do so within the next few days, Nixon would reassess the entire relationship between Washington and Moscow, including the summit meeting scheduled for the following May.

Regarding South Asia, Kissinger said that "If all parties could get behind such a resolution then the situation on the subcontinent could be settled tomorrow."

Vorontsov asked why the United States "would not be willing to go beyond a resolution calling for a simple ceasefire since this was not adequate in the Soviet or the Indian viewpoint".

Kissinger replied that the resolution might be expanded to include withdrawal since the Indian forces had penetrated quite a bit of Pakistani territory. Thus far, Soviet reactions had been slow and characterized by delaying tactics. The United States had observed that the Soviet bureaucracy moved with the greatest speed when it chose to do so.

Vorontsov stated that the complication arose when the United States changed the proposals it had made to the Soviets during the previous week. This was a cause of great concern to the Soviet leaders. Of particular concern was that the United States dropped the reference to a political solution, which was contained in the language given earlier by Kissinger to Vorontsov.

Kissinger stated this was true, but it was necessary because of Moscow's failure to respond promptly to the U.S. proposal. Vorontsov said the problem was obviously not a question of ill will on the part of either Russia or the US, but one of the complexity of the problem.

Kissinger said he must blame the Soviet Union for letting the current situation develop. For example, the arms supply to India and threats to China – which served as a guarantee and cover for Indian action – caused the difficulty.

Vorontsov replied that the Pakistan had the U.S. armament, some Soviet armament, and some Chinese armament. The real problem was the result of grievous errors Pakistan made in the East wing.

Kissinger stressed the need for urgent action. Washington was prepared to give up its demand for withdrawal, if the Soviets dropped its demands for a political settlement. This posed an obvious compromise.

Vorontsov noted that the U.S. departure from its earlier language was what had caused the problem.

Kissinger reiterated that this was forced on the U.S. side because Moscow delayed its answer for a long time. Thus Washington was forced to move based on its principles.

Vorontsov retorted that when the United States dropped the three essential points contained in its initial proposal, Moscow was greatly disturbed. The Soviet Union had originally been very pleased by the U.S. move in Dhaka, but then a sudden departure from the political initiative caused great concern in Moscow. The present problem was that it was time to prevent a bloodbath in East Pakistan and all parties must act. He suggested that the only viable resolution was the transfer of power to Bangladesh.

Kissinger said the U.S. government could not agree with this kind of resolution.

Vorontsov countered that the question was academic as the East Pakistan government had already resigned.

At that point Kissinger said he would like to summarize his understanding of the situation: The Indians would not attack the West, nor would they seek to acquire Pakistan territory. They would return to the territorial limits that existed before the crisis – in other words, to a status quo ante.

Vorontsov said that would also be the Soviet Union's understanding.

Kissinger said the issue then was to get a settlement in East Pakistan.

Vorontsov agreed, noting the need to find a means to prevent a bloodbath.

Kissinger replied the original U.S. statement was an objective one, and not suitable for a U.N. resolution.

Vorontsov agreed.

Kissinger said that the best compromise was something like the UK resolution, which the United States did not like, either. On the other hand, if the Soviets continued to seek a fait accompli, then the U.S. government must draw its own conclusions from this reality.

Vorontsov asked what Kissinger considered as an ideal solution.

Kissinger replied that Washington knew East Pakistan would not go back to the West. On the other hand, the United States could not legally accept an overt change in status, and efforts within the United Nations to force the U.S. government to do so must be vetoed. Washington considered that a fait accompli had occurred in the East and the problem was to proceed from that point.

On the other hand, Kissinger continued, India sought not only to break East Pakistan, but to do so under a mantle of legitimacy. This was more than the United States could accept. Just two weeks earlier, Gandhi said the situation in East Pakistan was an internal Pakistani problem. Thus, steps from this point on should be to stop the fighting, Kissinger said.

Why should the United States struggle with the Soviet Union at the expense of its relations with Moscow on an issue like Bangladesh, especially when there are such heavy issues like the Middle East to be settled between the two sides? Kissinger asked. Furthermore, he said, the United States was not "anti-India" as some would infer. Certainly, the Soviets knew what the real problem was, Kissinger concluded.

## **Yahya Appeals To Nixon Again For Help**

In Islamabad, Yahya still was in a fighting mood, but worried that India would destroy West Pakistan. On 14 December, he wrote to Nixon seeking arms. "The Russian proposal about the ceasefire, withdrawal and negotiations has by now clearly been demonstrated to have been only a hoax," he wrote. "They are pursuing filibustering tactics in the Security Council. This does not leave any doubt about their aim of making the military conquest of East Pakistan a fait accompli. The passage of time is clearly playing into the hands of the Russians. We are convinced that, after acquiring East Pakistan, they would let the Indians turn their might single-mindedly against West Pakistan for which they have already begun to equip the Indians."

Yahya insisted that "Pakistan has the will to defend itself, but for this determination on our part to have any meaning, our supply lines must be kept open and adequate equipment to withstand the increasing Indian power should flow through them while there may still be time. The American assistance has to assume, without any further loss of time, meaningful dimensions."

He said the American intervention in the situation did "not only have to be credible but also tangible and meaningful. Time has come for the United States to go beyond warnings and *démarches* if its determination to punish aggression across international borders is to have any effect on the Soviet Union and India."

Yahya later phoned Farland to tell him that Pakistan immediately needed twenty B57s. Farland merely said he would pass on the request to Washington, but did not give any assurances.

The same day, the Soviet Union reassured Nixon that India would not attack West Pakistan.

"We are in constant contact with the Indian side. One of the results of these very contacts was the message transmitted to you on 12 December that India has no intention to take any military action in connection with West Pakistan. We have firm assurances by the Indian leadership that India has no plans of seizing West Pakistan territory. Thus as far as intentions of India are concerned there is no lack of clarity to which you have referred," the Soviet leadership told Nixon.

At the same time, Moscow insisted that "it would be good if the American side on its part also stressed to the Pakistani government the necessity of embarking on the path towards political settlement in East Pakistan on the basis which is now rather clear" – an independent Bangladesh.

On 15 December, Pakistan's foreign secretary summoned Farland to the foreign office at 6 p.m. Sultan Khan told the ambassador that Bhutto had indicated from New York he was highly pessimistic that any affirmative action would come from the U.N. Security Council. In addition, Pakistan's intelligence indicated that India was preparing for an offensive against West Pakistan. For West Pakistan to survive as a nation, it must receive additional fighter aircraft. The present trickle of MIG-19s and F-104s from Jordan could not stem the tide if India attacked – an event that Pakistan was then anticipating.

In Washington, Kissinger told Nixon on 15 December that the Russians had guaranteed that "India would not attack West Pakistan." A solution might be formalized by a public exchange of letters between Nixon and Brezhnev, he added.

Nixon asked how the Chinese would react to a Moscow-Washington public accommodation.

Kissinger responded: "Oh, the Chinese would be thrilled if West Pakistan were guaranteed."

Kissinger mentioned about his talks with Vorontsov the previous evening. "I have this whole file of intelligence reports, which makes it unmistakably clear that the Indian strategy was to knock over West Pakistan," he said.

During the discussion, they expressed concerns about Jha's interviews with the American media to sway public opinion.

Kissinger: "After this is over, we ought to do something about that the [sic] goddamned Indian ambassador here going on television every day and attacking American policy."

Nixon: "Why haven't we done something already?"

Kissinger: "I'd like to call the State to call him in. He says he has unmistakable proof that we are planning a landing on the Bay of Bengal. Well, that's OK with me."

Nixon: "Yeah, that scares them"

Kissinger: "That carrier move is good."

Nixon: "Why the hell yes... the point about the carrier move, we just say... we got to be there for the purpose of their moving there. Look, these

people are savages.”

He said the United Nations would die “and we cannot have a stable world if we allow one member of the United Nations to cannibalize another. Cannibalize, that’s the word, I should have thought of it earlier. You see that really puts it to the Indians. It has, the connotation is savages. To cannibalize, and that’s what the sons-of-bitches are up to.”

Kissinger later told Nixon that Bhutto had declined to give Niazi’s ceasefire proposal to the Indians in New York, according to a memorandum sent by the national security adviser to the president on 15 December 1971. “Bhutto is apparently being careful to sidestep the onus for the surrender of East Pakistan,” Kissinger commented.

The latest Indian reports indicated that Dhaka was receiving heavy artillery fire, and three Indian columns had advanced within a few miles of the city where they were preparing for an attack. He said the Indians were being tough on the transfer of East Pakistan governmental functions to a new civilian government. The Indians submitted their own draft that included the following: “Recognizes that simultaneously with the ceasefire in East Pakistan power shall be transferred to the representatives of the majority party elected in December 1970.”

The Pakistanis, meanwhile, had shown a new turn of attitude. They felt that, since East Pakistan was lost, a U.N. resolution legitimizing the Indian seizure might be unacceptable. Bhutto’s greatest concern was a ceasefire in the West, where heavy fighting continued in Kashmir, but the principal Pakistani drive appeared to have been blunted. One Indian reserve division was airlifted from the Kolkata area to an undetermined location on the western front.

Kissinger said a Chinese delivery of additional MIG-19s to West Pakistan might be underway. An undetermined number of MIGs were spotted flying in the direction of an airfield that had been used in the past as a base for onward flight to Pakistan. He also told Nixon that Pakistan’s U.N. representative said China would make “an important military move” on 15 December, but no evidence of Chinese troop movements was visible. Pakistan’s high hopes would remain unfulfilled.

However, since late November, several Muslim countries – including Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Egypt – have sent, or were planning to send, military equipment to Pakistan, including jet fighters and spare parts for Pakistani aircraft. But there was no firm evidence to corroborate that such equipment had actually been transferred. The CIA reported that a squadron of American-origin Jordanian F-104s was delivered to Pakistan on 13 December, despite an American embargo on military supplies to both India and Pakistan.

Kissinger told Nixon that the carrier task force, which was transiting the Straits of Malacca, should arrive at a point near the center of the base of the Bay of Bengal on 15 December in the evening. “Rumors about this move are already widespread in the area where they are being combined with stories that the United States is considering military assistance to Pakistan,” he added.

On 16 December at 9:30 a.m., Kissinger called Nixon after East Pakistan had surrendered.

Nixon: “On the India-Pakistan thing, Dacca has surrendered and now the issue is...”

Kissinger: “Now, if in the next 24 hours the Indians don’t agree to a ceasefire in the West we are in for it. Up until now, it could be explained that the Soviets wanted to wait until Dacca had surrendered.”

Nixon: “Has the proposal been put up in...”

Kissinger: “No, it has been tabled and there will probably be a vote today. And, that will be the test.”

Nixon: “Well, they [the Soviets] will veto it.”

Kissinger: “Well, I don’t know. They aren’t saying anything any more.”

Nixon: “Then under the circumstances, would they just continue the war?”

Kissinger: “There are three possibilities: first, the British proposal carries; second, India-Pakistan ceasefire and third, the Indians continue the war until they smash the Pakistanis in Kashmir. Now we have had another appeal from the Pakistanis last night. Action is picking up in the West and they are asking for American planes, but we cannot even consider this. If this isn’t settled by tomorrow night we will know the Russians have put it to us.”

Nixon: “The one thing I am disappointed about, really teed off at, is that you were unable to get out that Indian cabinet meeting thing. We have got to get it out.”

Kissinger: “We will do it.”

Nixon: “I know there are a lot of pro-Indian people in the State and who are trying to delay this. But I want it. We ought to be pressing the Indians every day. Now that Dacca has fallen, we have got to get that ambassador in here and tell him the president is outraged about what he has done using our television and radio facilities to do it.” Nixon referred to Jha’s interviews with the U.S. media.

Implementing Nixon’s instructions, on 16 December Sisco summoned Jha to the State Department. Nixon had told Sisco to warn the Indians that since East Pakistan had fallen, continued fighting would “have the most drastic consequences on U.S.-Indian relations.” By the time he met Jha, Sisco had seen press reports that India had already proposed a ceasefire on the Western front. So, instead of conveying Nixon’s warning, Sisco requested Jha to confirm the proposed ceasefire.

In the morning of 17 December, Farland saw Yahya to urge him to accept India’s ceasefire offer. The general said he already had indicated his willingness to do so by accepting the General Assembly resolution ten days earlier. He saw no need to reiterate that position. Upon the ambassador’s further urging, Yahya agreed to consider formally responding to India’s proposal. Before leaving the president’s house, Farland told Yahya that if he rejected the offer, America would need to evacuate its nonessential citizens from Pakistan, a hint that Washington anticipated the conflict to escalate. At 3 p.m., Pakistan’s foreign secretary informed Farland that Yahya would publicly accept the offer, bringing East Pakistan’s nine-month long crisis to an end, but not exactly the way he had wished.

## Why Niazi Surrendered

On 14 December at 5:20 p.m., the U.S. consul general in Dhaka received a call from General AAK Niazi, the commander of Pakistan's Eastern sector, to "receive him urgently." He appeared at the consulate shortly, along with General Rao Farman Ali, the military adviser to the governor of East Pakistan. He told Spivack that the bombing of Dhaka in the afternoon "had convinced him that the fighting must be stopped immediately to prevent further bloodshed, even though, he said, his troops were still in good positions and were not in the danger at the moment." Farman Ali had in his possession a rough draft proposal he wished the consul general to transmit to New Delhi so that it could be passed on through Indian channels to the Indian field commander in East Pakistan.

After some discussion, they drew up a proposal in the form of a letter to Spivack, which both Niazi and Farman Ali signed.

The proposal read:

"In order to save future loss of innocent human lives, which would inevitably result from further hostilities in the major cities like Dacca, I request you to arrange for an immediate ceasefire under the following conditions: (A) Regrouping of Pakistan armed forces in designated areas to be mutually agreed upon between the commanders of the opposing forces; (B) To guarantee the safety of all military and paramilitary forces; (C) Safety of all those who had settled in East Pakistan since 1947; (D) No reprisals against those who helped the administration since March 1971.

"In those conditions, the Pakistan armed forces and paramilitary forces would immediately cease all military operations. I would further abide by any resolutions, which the Security Council of the United Nations may pass for the permanent settlement of the present dispute. I make this proposal with the full authority vested in me by virtue of my position as the martial law administrator of Zone B [East Pakistan] and Commander, Eastern Command, exercising final authority over all Pakistan military and paramilitary forces in this area."

Niazi asked that the U.S. envoy indicate in his transmittal message that the general was prepared to name a representative immediately to discuss the details of his offer with an Indian counterpart. He hoped that the Indian commander would do the same immediately, so that negotiations could begin at once.

Niazi and Farman still wished to avoid using the word "surrender." Niazi stated he had full authority to take the above action. When Spivack questioned him specifically whether any concurrence was required by Yahya or anyone else in Islamabad, his reply was a definite "no."

The consul general reported to Washington that Niazi would send his ADC to his office in about two hours when he hoped some sort of reaction would be available. He was quite anxious that some progress be made before daylight the next day, when he feared bombing in Dhaka would resume.

Regarding Niazi's authority to act, the envoy noted that Malik had left the Governor House to seek protection from the International Red Cross, thus abdicating any governmental function. Farman Ali said Malik had resigned.

Spivack had earlier received a call from Malik that the governor and Farman Ali wanted to submit certain ceasefire proposals. Malik, who had received a threat that the Indians would hand over all the prisoners to the Mukti Bahini to be "butchered", felt a ceasefire was absolutely necessary because the situation had hopelessly worsened. He assured the consul general the proposals would carry their signatures and would have Yahya's approval. Shortly afterwards Malik called Spivack to say he would not submit the proposals because Niazi had stated that talks were taking place between the central government and Farland, the U.S. ambassador in Islamabad. In fact, Yahya had authorized Malik on 9 December to arrange a ceasefire based on a bleak picture the governor painted, according to the Pakistan war commission report. But the president backed off on 11 December when he received signals that China and the United States would come to his rescue. Based on the false indications, Yahya ordered Malik not to take any action on his last message, adding that "very important diplomatic and military moves are taking place by our friends." It was "essential that we hold on for another thirty-six hours at all costs," the general advised the governor.

Commenting on Malik's backtracking, Spivack said in a cable to the State Department on 14 December, "There still appears to be strong difference of opinion between Niazi and Farman, with the governor oscillating feebly between. Farman, obviously, desires to initiate some kind of action on the basis of his appreciation of what he considers desperate local situation. Niazi, whether on instructions from Islamabad or in line with his own romantic view of himself as a dedicated soldier, is opposed. In effect, the question boils down to whether the Pak army in the East is to be sacrificed, together with uncounted thousands of civilians in East Pakistan in order to retain some bargaining position in the West."

### Yahya Authorizes Ceasefire In East Pakistan

Subsequently, when the State Department received Niazi's proposal, it immediately told Farland to see Yahya to ascertain what he wanted the United States to do. Farland replied Yahya had indicated, through Sultan Khan, that Niazi had the full authority to act along the lines reported in the telegram from Dhaka.

Yahya authorized passing the proposal to New Delhi and to Bhutto in New York, but the State Department was wary of putting itself between Indian and Pakistani military authorities. Thus it directed the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi not to deliver Niazi's proposal to the Indian government. Rather, the U.S. Mission at the United Nations was advised to give the message to Bhutto, with the suggestion that he might want to pass it either on to the Indian foreign minister in New York or through the U.N. secretary general. Bhutto chose not to give the message to the Indians. After confirming that Yahya wanted the message delivered, the State Department told the U.S. Mission to deliver the message to the Indian delegation.

In New Delhi, Keating gave Niazi's proposal to Haksar on 15 December, with a copy to General Sam Manekshaw, the Indian army chief. Haksar asked the envoy in a voice choked with emotion, "where our overall relations had gone off the track." He recounted at some length the discussions with Kissinger and Sisco during Gandhi's U.S. visit in November and stressed that there could be no question of the integrity of Gandhi's remarks to Nixon.

Haksar then turned philosophical. All human affairs were transitory and he was not so much concerned about the present, as it would pass, as he was about the future. He expressed concern about the relations our children would have and what we owed to them.

"Haksar became quite emotional, his eyes watering, and asked what we could do," Keating cabled the State Department, summarizing his conversation. He suggested that Gandhi send a letter to Nixon, and Haksar promised to draft one that afternoon.

At 6 p.m., Haksar called in the deputy chief of the U.S. mission and handed him the text of Manekshaw's message to Niazi. India "was conveying a response to Niazi through the United States since we had been good enough to pass on the original Niazi proposal," the embassy reported to Washington.

Haksar described the reply as a "carefully considered and sincere response," especially noting that the Indian military had already announced the cessation of air attacks on Dhaka effective 5 p.m. of 15 December.

In his message, Manekshaw reiterated his guarantees previously given to Rao Farman Ali, promising to ensure "safety of all your military and paramilitary forces who surrender to me in Bangladesh." He promised to give "complete protection to foreign nationals, ethnic minorities and personnel of West Pakistan, no matter who they may be."

The Indian military chief also pledged to treat the Pakistani forces according to the Geneva Convention. As soon as he received a positive response from Niazi, he assured, "I shall direct General Aurora, the commander of Indian and Bangladesh forces in the Eastern theater, to refrain from all air and ground action against your forces. As a token of my good faith, I have ordered that no air action shall take place over Dacca from 1700 hours today."

Along with the guarantees came Manekshaw's warning: "I assure you I have no desire to inflict unnecessary casualties on your troops as I abhor loss of human lives. Should, however, you do not comply with what I have stated, you will leave me with no other alternative but to resume my offensive with the utmost vigor at 0900 hours Indian standard time on 16 December," India's army chief cautioned.

In Washington, Jha delivered Gandhi's letter to Nixon on 15 December, as Haksar had promised to Keating. Gandhi's letter echoed the sentiment her father expressed in his address when India awoke at midnight in 1947 while the rest of the world was fast asleep.

"I am writing at a moment of deep anguish at the unhappy turn which the relations between our two countries have taken," Gandhi wrote. "I am setting aside all pride, prejudice and passion and trying, as calmly as I can, to analyze once again the origins of the tragedy which is being enacted.

"There are moments in history when brooding tragedy and its dark shadows can be lightened by recalling great moments of the past. One such great moment, which has inspired millions of people to die for liberty, was the Declaration of Independence by the United States of America. That declaration stated that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of man's inalienable rights to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, it was the right of the people to alter or abolish it.

"All unprejudiced persons objectively surveying the grim events in Bangladesh since March 25 have recognized the revolt of 75 million people, a people who were forced to the conclusion that neither their life, nor their liberty, to say nothing of the possibility of the pursuit of happiness, was available to them. The world press, radio and television have faithfully recorded the story. The most perceptive of American scholars who are knowledgeable about the affairs of this subcontinent revealed the anatomy of East Bengal's frustrations.

"The tragic war, which is continuing, could have been averted if during the nine months prior to Pakistan's attack on us on 3 December, the great leaders of the world had paid some attention to the fact of the revolt, tried to see the reality of the situation and searched for a genuine basis for reconciliation. I wrote letters along these lines. I undertook a tour in quest of peace at a time when it was extremely difficult to leave, in the hope of presenting to some of the leaders of the world the situation as I saw it. It was heartbreaking to find that while there was sympathy for the poor refugees, the disease itself was ignored.

"War could also have been avoided if the power, influence and authority of all the states and above all the United States, had got Sheikh Mujibur Rahman released. Instead, we were told that a civilian administration was being installed. Everyone knows that this civilian administration was a farce; today the farce has turned into a tragedy.

"Lip service was paid to the need for a political solution, but not a single worthwhile step was taken to bring this about. Instead, the rulers of West Pakistan went ahead holding farcical elections to seats which had been arbitrarily declared vacant.

"There was not even a whisper that anyone from the outside world, had tried to have contact with Mujibur Rahman. Our earnest plea that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman should be released, or that, even if he were to be kept under detention, contact with him might be established, was not considered practical on the ground that the United States could not urge policies which might lead to the overthrow of President Yahya Khan. While the United States recognized that Mujib was a core factor in the situation and that unquestionably in the long run Pakistan must acquiesce in the direction of greater autonomy for East Pakistan, arguments were advanced to demonstrate the fragility of the situation and of Yahya Khan's difficulty.

"Mr. President, may I ask you in all sincerity: Was the release or even secret negotiations with a single human being, namely, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, more disastrous than the waging of a war?

"The fact of the matter is that the rulers of West Pakistan got away with the impression that they could do what they liked because no one, not even the United States, would choose to take a public position that while Pakistan's integrity was certainly sacrosanct, human rights, liberty were no less so and that there was a necessary inter-connection between the inviolability of states and the contentment of their people.

"Mr. President, despite the continued defiance by the rulers of Pakistan of the most elementary facts of life, we would still have tried our hardest to restrain the mounting pressure as we had for nine long months, and war could have been prevented had the rulers of Pakistan not launched a massive attack on us by bombing our airfields in Amritsar, Pathogen, Srinagar, Avantipur, Utterlai, Jodhpur, Ambala and Agra in the broad day light on 3 December 1971, at a time when I was away in Calcutta, my colleague, the defense minister, was in Patna and was due to leave further for Bangalore in the South and another senior colleague of mine, the foreign minister, was in Bombay. The fact that this initiative was taken at this particular time of our absence from the capital showed perfidious intentions. In the face of this, could we simply sit back trusting that the rulers of Pakistan or those who were advising them, had peaceful, constructive and reasonable intent?

"We are asked what we want. We seek nothing for ourselves. We do not want any territory of what was East Pakistan and now constitutes Bangladesh. We do not want any territory of West Pakistan. We do want lasting peace with Pakistan. But will Pakistan give up its ceaseless and yet pointless agitation of the past 24 years over Kashmir? Are they willing to give up their hate campaign posture of perpetual hostility towards

India? How many times in the last 24 years have my father and I offered a pact of non-aggression to Pakistan? It is a matter of recorded history that each time such offer was made, Pakistan rejected it out of hand.

"We are deeply hurt by the innuendos and insinuations that it was we who have precipitated the crisis and have in any way thwarted the emergence of solutions. I do not really know who is responsible for this calumny. During my visit to the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Austria and Belgium the point I emphasized, publicly as well as privately, was the immediate need for a political settlement. We waited nine months for it. When Dr. Kissinger came in August 1971, I had emphasized to him the importance of seeking an early political settlement. But we have not received, even to this day, the barest framework of a settlement, which would take into account the facts as they are and not as we imagine them to be.

"Be that as it may, it is my earnest and sincere hope that with all the knowledge and deep understanding of human affairs you, as president of the United States and reflecting the will, the aspirations and idealism of the great American people, will at least let me know where precisely we have gone wrong before your representatives or spokesmen deal with us with such harshness of language."

Kissinger asked the State Department to draft a response to Gandhi's letter, but it was not done until after the Pakistani soldiers in East Pakistan surrendered to the Indian forces.

On 15 December, Kissinger talked with Nixon in the evening about Bangladesh.

Kissinger told the president, "Now the Indians are unbelievable. The Indians are demanding the United Nations agree for the turnover of authority to Bangladesh. Now that would make the United Nations an active participant in aggression. I don't think we can agree to this."

Nixon: "No."

Kissinger: "Now the Soviets have just told the British they would veto the British resolution. If this plays out that way we may really have to ask ourselves what the Soviets are up to."

Nixon: "That could be. Although they just may have a very, very hot potato on their hands with the Indians."

Kissinger: "That could be, but the political outcome would be the same either way. They have already humiliated the Chinese beyond expression and they will humiliate us, but we don't have to face that yet."

Nixon: "Yes."

Kissinger: "We did get a message from the Germans urgently asking to examine the West situation and that fighting must be brought to a stop."

Nixon: "And now we have a veto of the British resolution."

Kissinger: "It hasn't been done yet."

Nixon: "Well, that lines up the British on our side."

Kissinger: "Cromer showed me a message he sent to Mrs. Gandhi and it was really tough."

Nixon: "Good. We shouldn't be too discouraged in some sense."

Kissinger: "John Chancellor [NBC news correspondent] told me that he would feature the Pakistani side tonight. I think Bhutto made a very moving speech in the Security Council."

Nixon: "So the letter to the Soviets really didn't settle the thing then as far as you are concerned?"

Kissinger: "No, and that is what is so revolting; that is what we have to ask ourselves. Now I agree they may have a bear by the tail and that is what we have to be concerned about. All they promised is no attack on West Pakistan, but that does not include Kashmir."

When Kissinger met with Vorontsov to discuss the Security Council resolution on 15 December, he told the Soviet envoy that America "would not agree to any resolution that recognized a turnover of authority" in East Pakistan. "There was a question of principle involved. It was bad enough that the United Nations was impotent in the case of military attack; it could not be asked to legitimize it."

Vorontsov told Kissinger the Soviet Union was prepared unconditionally to guarantee that there would be no Indian attack on the Western front or on Kashmir. He added that when the Russians referred to West Pakistan they meant the existing dividing line. However, to do this publicly would mean that they were, in effect, speaking for a friendly country. After all, he noted, India was not a client state.

Referring to his conversation with the Russian diplomat, Kissinger told Nixon: "I said that the course of events was obvious: Either there would be a ceasefire soon in the West anyway through the United Nations or through direct dealings with us, or else we would have to draw appropriate conclusions."

The Soviet Union agreed to persuade India to accept a ceasefire immediately.

In the morning of 16 December, Nixon and Rogers discussed the evolving crisis in South Asia on the phone. Rogers described the situation in East Pakistan as "pretty bleak" for Pakistan.

Nixon agreed, but added that Indian forces might face a difficult task if they tried to take West Pakistan.

Rogers concurred and said: "I rather hope that the West Paks can do some good up in Kashmir, maybe they can make some offsetting gains up in there."

## **Dhaka: Free Capital Of A Free Country**

On 16 December at 2:30 p.m., Gandhi, who had been compared with the Hindu goddess Durga by many Indians, told Lok Sabha that the Pakistani forces commanded by Niazi had surrendered unconditionally an hour earlier in Dhaka. She hailed Dhaka as "the free capital of a free country." At the same time, India announced a ceasefire to take effect in the West the following day.

Earlier in the morning, the Bangladesh government representatives had given Major General JFR Jacob, chief of staff of the Indian army's Eastern Command, four conditions to be imposed on Pakistan as part of the surrender agreement: Mujib be returned safely to Bangladesh; the Bengalis stranded in West Pakistan be allowed to return safely to Bangladesh; the Bengali members of the Pakistan army be permitted to return home and the Pakistan soldiers in Bangladesh must surrender their weapons and equipment to the joint Indo-Bangladesh armed forces command; and Nurul Amin, who had just been named prime minister of Pakistan, be sent to Bangladesh, along with other the Bengali "quislings" to stand trial.

The Indian military was more concerned about getting Niazi's acceptance of the surrender than implementing the demands of the Bangladesh

leaders. To persuade Niazi, the Indian generals assured him of honorable treatment in accordance with international law.

"My dear Abdullah, I am here. The game is up. I suggest you give yourself up to me. I will look after you," assured Major General Gandharva Singh Nagra in a note to Niazi soon after the Indian troops had entered Dhaka.

When Nagra walked into Niazi's office, he instantly recognized Niazi, whom he had known since his days in Pakistan as India's military attache in the early 1960s. Niazi had gained some weight, but his face still radiated the same glow.

"Hello Abdullah, how are you?" Nagra asked. The Tiger had turned into a lamb. He broke down and exclaimed in Urdu that the people sitting in Rawalpindi doomed him. Nagra let him talk to lighten his heart and together they sipped tea, before Nagra left to receive Jacob at the airport.

Niazi, who surrendered to General Jagjit Singh Aurora, commander of the Eastern sector of the Indian army, remained defiant until his death. He refused to accept the blame for the surrender, rebuffing the Pakistan war commission's suggestion that he should have embraced a hero's death fighting to the end. He rather blamed Yahya for the surrender.

Niazi, accused by the commission of being a womanizer and engaging in betel leaf exports from East to West Pakistan during the war, claimed he surrendered at the general headquarters' instruction.

"I swear on oath that I was given clear-cut orders from Yahya to surrender, but still I was determined to fight till the end. I even sent a message that my decision to fight till the end stands. However, General Abdul Hamid Khan and Air Chief Marshal Rahim rang me up, ordering me to act on the GHQ signal of 14 December 1971, because West Pakistan was in danger," Niazi said in an interview with Amir Mir of *India Aboard* newspaper in December 2001. "It was at this stage that I was asked to agree on a ceasefire so that the safety of the troops could be ensured."

Yahya and the other generals told him to surrender because they were worried India would destroy the entire Pakistani army and break up West Pakistan into pieces, if Islamabad continued fighting. Niazi's claim stands to logic. New Delhi, in fact, had planned to crush Pakistan's army to a point that it ceased to be a military force capable of ever again waging another war against India, an idea Gandhi changed under pressure from the Soviet Union to avoid escalating war and involving the superpowers in it.

Yahya, however, naively hoped that outside forces, namely China and the United States, would come to his rescue. Based on assurances from Washington and Beijing, he sought to keep the Eastern Command's morale high.

Indeed, according to the war commission, on 5 December, as the Indian military marched toward Dhaka, the chief of staff sent a message to Niazi: "The enemy will attempt to capture East Pakistan as swiftly as possible and then shift maximum to face West Pakistan. This must NOT be allowed to happen. Losing of some territory is insignificant. Every hope of Chinese activities very soon. Good luck and keep up your magnificent work against heavy odds. May Allah bless you."

In the end, no one came to save Pakistan.

Two days later, with only seven days' supply of food left, the troops in Dhaka faced a bleak situation, prompting the governor to send a message to Yahya. Malik wanted to bring the "correct situation" to the president's notice. After detailing the resource shortage, the governor said, "Millions of non-Bengalis and loyal elements are awaiting death. No amount of lip sympathy or even material help from world powers except direct physical intervention will help. If any of our friends is expected to help that should have an impact within the next 48 hours." If not, Malik added, it was imperative to negotiate a "civilized and peaceful transfer" of power. "Is it worth sacrificing so much when the end seems inevitable?" the governor asked.

But the Pakistani military headquarters continued giving false hopes. On 11 December, the chief of staff sent Niazi a signal: "The NEFA front has been activated by the Chinese, although the Indians for obvious reasons have not announced it," and the U.S. Seventh Fleet "will be very soon in position."

Perhaps buoyed by this misleading message on 12 December, Niazi promised to make Dhaka a "fortress and fight it out till the end." He was so defiant as to boast to reporters that Indian tanks would have to go over his chest first. Over the next couple of days, as the military situation got worse, Niazi lost his nerve after an Indian threat that the Indians would hand over the Pakistani prisoners to the 'Mukti Fauj for butchery' if he refused to surrender. On 14 December, Yahya sent a message back to the governor and Niazi: "You have fought a heroic battle against overwhelming odds. The nation is proud of you and the world full of admiration. You have now reached a stage where further resistance is no longer humanly possible nor will it serve any useful purpose."

The last two messages were intercepted by India, giving the Indian military an indication that Pakistan was willing to surrender. This message "alone must have had disastrous effect. The United Nations Security Council was in session, but it is difficult to see how we could with any confidence expect to secure any success there with this open confession of our weakness and clear willingness to accept any terms. Even those nations upon whose help we could have in some degree relied were hardly able to help after this," the war commission observed. "Besides this important effect on Pakistan's case in the United Nations we think that it might we have prompted General Manekshaw to insist upon a surrender even though General Niazi was only proposing a ceasefire."

Indeed, Manekshaw used the word "surrender" for the first time on 15 December.

The message Malik and Farman Ali sent via U.N. Assistant Secretary General Paul Marc Henry from Dhaka on 15 December had no mention of "surrender". "I have been informed by Governor Malik and General Farman Ali that President Yahya Khan strongly desires to put an end to hostilities in East Pakistan. For this purpose, he wishes to arrange with the Indian government an immediate ceasefire period of at least two hours in which discussions for this purpose can take place between the military commanders concerned. The president desires honorable conditions for the Pakistani troops and protection of civilians," Henry's message said.

A day earlier when Farman Ali met with the U.S. consul general to send a ceasefire proposal to India, he was still reluctant to face up to the word "surrender," and hoped that the Pakistani forces would be able retain their arms, even though they might have to turn over all ammunition to the Indians, Spivack informed the State Department.

On 29 October 1974, Swaran Singh told Kissinger during a meeting in New Delhi that "during the Bangladesh War, we intercepted messages from Yahya in the East; he sent frantic messages: You will receive help from the sea and from the north. Therefore, don't lose heart. Stick on."

Chinese premier Chou En-lai denied during a conversation with Kissinger in 1972 that China ever promised military intervention on Pakistan's behalf, as Bhutto had led many to believe.

Another fact supporting Niazi's claim came directly from Yahya's actions. Yahya went on the radio after Niazi's surrender to reassure his



shocked nation that even though fighting had ceased on the Eastern front “due to an arrangement between the local commanders,” the war would continue. However, the very next day, realising that his chances of surviving a full-scale war on the Western front without American or Chinese support were nil, he agreed to a ceasefire, as Washington had urged.

Niazi blamed Bhutto, too, for the debacle, saying he conspired with the military to surrender the Eastern wing to India to fulfill his ambition to rule West Pakistan.

The war commission, however, had difficulty to reach a clear conclusion whether Yahya’s message implied consent to surrender because of doubtful interpretation of the president’s message and subsequent contradictory signals from the top generals in Pakistan.

“We have come to the conclusion that there was no order to surrender, but in view of the desperate picture painted by the commander, Eastern Command, the higher authorities only gave him permission to surrender if he, in his judgment, thought it was necessary. General Niazi could have disobeyed such an order, if he thought he had the capability of defending Dacca. On his own estimate, he had 26,400 men at Dacca in uniform, and he could have held out for at least another two weeks, because the enemy would have taken a week to build up its forces in the Dacca area and another week to reduce the fortress of Dacca. If General Niazi had done so and lost his life in the process, he would have made history and would have been remembered by the coming generations as a great hero and a martyr, but the events show that he had already lost the will to fight after the 7th December 1971, when his major fortresses at Jessore and Brahmanbaria had fallen. The question of creating history, therefore, was never in his mind.”

Even more painful than Niazi’s military failures was the manner in which he signed the surrender document – laying down arms to the Indian and Mukti Bahini joint-command, receiving the victorious general at the airport, giving the Indian general an honor guard and finally taking part in the public surrender ceremony at the Race Course – to Pakistan’s and its armed forces’ everlasting shame, the war commission lamented.

“Even if he had been obliged to surrender, by force of circumstances, it was not necessary for him to behave in this shameful manner at every step of the process of surrender. The detailed accounts, which have been given before the commission by those who had the misfortune of witnessing these events, leave no doubt that Lt. General Niazi had suffered a complete moral collapse during the closing phases of the war,” the panel concluded.

## Bangladesh Wins Freedom: America Faces New Reality

After Dhaka fell on 16 December 1971, India announced that four members of the Bangladesh government-in-exile had flown to the capital of the new nation earlier in the day to form a transitional government. The remaining leaders would join them the next day. Before their departure, Gandhi suggested Bangladesh form a broad-based national government resembling the consultative committee in Kolkata rather than the continuation of the revised provisional government. The Awami League leaders had resisted the pressure, but Gandhi made a deal with them before they left India. Under the pact, the nine-member advisory panel were to constitute the new government's nucleus. But the Awami League leaders reneged on their promise as soon as they felt the natural support of their own soil.

The day Pakistan surrendered in East Pakistan, the Washington Special Action Group discussed the question, "where do we go from here?" It decided to prepare a paper on the America policy towards the South Asian nation, "assuming that we would not be prepared promptly to recognize Bangladesh."

While the State Department began drafting the policy, Rogers told Spivack to avoid contacts with the Bangladesh government unless it was an emergency or to save American lives. The U.S. mission in Dhaka had advocated five days before Pakistan surrendered to establish contacts with the Bangladesh representatives.

"We note with interest that the British are moving smartly ahead to establish some basis for early dealing with Bangladesh, which now appears to be as certain as anything normally in international affairs," Spivack wrote to Washington on 11 December.

He added that despite "difficult and complicated questions involved in working out conditions in which we would recognize new sovereignty, such as Bangladesh, it seems to us that at this stage of the game some little preparation, such as the British are obviously doing, could make things much easier."

He referred to a previous State Department note that said Washington would not mount a major effort to maintain territorial integrity of Pakistan and its armed forces, "including East Pakistan". "Therefore," he said, "I again strongly urge that we make preliminary sounding with reliable Bangladesh representatives in Washington or elsewhere, which would, at the very least, prevent them from assuming that we are unalterably opposed to the idea of an independent Bangladesh or that we would take inordinately long to recognize Bangladesh."

Washington paid no attention to Spivack's advice. It rather listened to Bhutto, who had just been designated Pakistan's deputy prime minister and foreign minister by Yahya, who went to New York to attend a U.N. session on the war. Bhutto met with Rogers on 18 December in Washington before his talks with Nixon. Raza, Pakistan's ambassador, accompanied Bhutto. Sisco and Bruce Laingen, country director for Pakistan and Afghanistan at the State Department, also attended from the American side. Bhutto told Rogers that Pakistan's unity could still be preserved under a very loose confederation, despite the surrender in East Pakistan.

He told the secretary of state that Pakistan's setback resulted from a proxy war between the Soviet Union and China as well as the United States. The "Soviets had defeated us," he said, adding Moscow had reversed its defeat in Cuba at Pakistan's cost. The Soviet Union wanted to show China that Moscow was the Third World leader.

Before leaving for New York, Bhutto had met Sober in Rawalpindi on 7 December. He told Sober he would seek an accommodation with Awami League leaders, including negotiations with Mujib, to resolve the crisis. At the appropriate time, he also wanted to go to New Delhi to seek reconciliation with India.

Soon after accepting the ceasefire, Yahya called Bhutto and asked him to return home. A special plane met him in Rome. Bhutto was anxious to get back. He figured the moment he had waited for too long might have finally arrived. Upon return, he decided he would ask Yahya to immediately transfer power to enable him to grapple with enormous problems facing Pakistan. Unless the military strongman complied, he would return to his "small ranch in the Sind." He was not going back to rock the boat or to challenge the authority. He had done that during the Ayub period, but the country was currently in a big mess to do that, he told the Americans. In some contradiction to this line, he made a point in his conversation in Washington that he hoped Pakistan would not have to fight another war to achieve the power transfer in West Pakistan.

Bhutto told the Americans that much of the tragedy since March could have been avoided by a swift power transfer. He said the military action on 25 March was inevitable, but what happened thereafter was unjustified. If the government could not carry the people with it, then everyone in the government would be pygmies and Pakistan would go from one difficulty to another, he added. He asked the United States not to act in haste to recognize what he referred to as the "so-called Bangladesh". He was convinced that the sentiment was still overwhelmingly pro-Pakistan in both the wings.

Asked by Rogers about the future of East-West Pakistan relations, Bhutto said Pakistan stood ready to negotiate a deal, but India must pull out its forces. Mujib was an important element, but the public opinion must first be prepared for his re-involvement in the picture. He did not believe that Mujib would remain an influential political figure beyond three months' time. Mujib was a good speaker, but "very blank in the head," Bhutto commented. He could have had all he wanted in March. Only history would say, however, who the real culprit was in March, i.e., "Mujib, Yahya or me". He declined to name who might lead the Awami League in Mujib's absence. There were others, he said, but they were not men of vision. Bhutto said the Soviets were pushing their people to the top in the Bangladesh leadership, a statement intended to exploit America's communist phobia.

Responding to a specific query from Rogers, Bhutto said a confederation on a "very loose basis" was possible in the past, but he was uncertain whether that was any longer possible. Turning to India, Bhutto said Gandhi now faced a dangerous situation. She had laid the basis for "Bangladeshes all over the subcontinent." She had let loose a "bug of secession" that could spread very fast in West Pakistan. Gandhi would rue the day she had "gone to bed with the Soviet bear", Bhutto predicted.

On 18 December, Bhutto also met with Nixon for some half an hour in the White House. When Nixon asked what he thought the future held for Pakistan, Bhutto said in the long run he hoped to re-establish good relationships with India. However, this would depend largely on India's actions in the weeks ahead. If India intended to crush Pakistan, animosity would last long, perhaps for decades. Bhutto expected the East Pakistan situation to be very fluid. In the long run, he said, India might find it had bitten off more than it could digest. He asked Nixon to avoid immediately recognizing Bangladesh, because this would cause big difficulties for Pakistan. Nixon said the time was not yet right to address the recognition issue.

## Bhutto Finally Topples Yahya

In Pakistan, huge demonstrations protested Yahya's handling of the crisis after the surrender in Dhaka. Faced with public uproar, Yahya handed over power to Bhutto on 20 December under pressure from the military. Bhutto was brought in as president and martial law administrator by high-ranking military officers after they had dismissed Yahya. Farland was the first ambassador to meet with Bhutto in his residence at the Punjab House [annex] in Rawalpindi at 4:30 p.m. for thirty minutes after he became president.

When Farland asked how the power transfer had come about, Bhutto said he had called upon Yahya soon after his return from New York. In a short but dramatic exchange, Yahya resigned as president and chief martial law administrator. Bhutto was operating under martial law authority, but said he would end the concept soon, because this was against his character. Asked about the promulgation of the constitution promised for 20 December, Bhutto said the events superseded that. A new constitution had to be written, which would be done as soon as possible.

Regarding Bangladesh, Bhutto rhetorically asked, "Can the two wings even yet be held together?"

Farland said his conversation with the Bengalis indicated that religiously and historically the bond was strong. But the events that had caused strains since 1947 and the untoward happenings of March 25 onward were matters that he, as a Pakistani and a Muslim, could best judge. Bhutto acknowledged the historic errors and disasters of the more recent past, but said that, if at all possible, he would strive to reconcile and reunite, holding the wings in some loose federation.

The ambassador asked whether Bhutto intended to release Sheikh Mujib. Bhutto said he wanted to do so, but his key supporters had warned him that Mujib's release "would be tantamount to Bhutto decreeing his own imprisonment". Bhutto intended to condition the Pakistanis to the need to free Mujib. He anticipated that Mujib might be exchanged for the thousands of Pakistani prisoners India had been holding since their surrender in East Pakistan.

Several hours after assuming power, Bhutto told the Pakistanis that Yahya and several other senior officers had retired and Lieutenant General Gul Hassan Khan had been named the new army commander-in-chief. He also declared that "East Pakistan is an inseparable and indissoluble part of Pakistan." He was, however, prepared for talks with the East Pakistani leaders within a Pakistan that could be a "loose arrangement".

Bhutto's takeover in Pakistan caused concern in Afghanistan. King Zahir Shah was deeply troubled with the prospect of having to deal with Bhutto. He described Bhutto as an "unbalanced man" and a "pathological liar", who was inflexible one moment and wavering the next. Zahir Shah said Bhutto would seek to strike a balance with the military but wondered how long it would last. It lasted only five years. The Pakistani military was back in its old game just five years after suffering the most humiliating defeat in its history and losing a part of its country.

The day Bhutto became president, Nixon met privately in Bermuda with the British prime minister. During the meeting, Nixon explained to Heath his policy regarding the Bangladesh Liberation War. "As we saw it, Yahya badly bungled the situation. We faced the question, should we keep our communication with Yahya? We decided to do it."

All America did was to elicit conciliatory steps from Yahya and to try to restrain the Indians. "The major mistake we made was to be too reassuring. We were the only restraining factor. We knew what the relative numbers were; we knew what the outcome of a war would be. Why not let it move? I felt that if it was true that her goal was to force Pakistan to surrender in the West, there would be serious repercussions on the world scene."

Nixon saw the South Asian crisis as part of a global power play. He said he would seek to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining an advantage from the creation of Bangladesh. "With respect to the Soviets, we'll play an arm's-length game. We won't recognize Bangladesh," Nixon told the British prime minister.

Heath, however, saw things differently. "We feel we must persuade Pakistan to recognize that it has lost the East. We need to put Bangladesh on a self-sustaining basis, or at least to mitigate its losses. We shall help both West Pakistan and Bangladesh, and also help in the consortium for India," he said.

On 21 December, Kissinger informed Nixon that the Bangladesh cabinet was expected in Dhaka by mid-week. The Bangladesh prime minister told Dhaka radio that his country needed massive foreign aid but that his government would "not touch" any part of American aid because of its "hateful and shameful" policy toward the new nation's "freedom struggle".

Kissinger told Nixon the next day that Bhutto would put Mujib under house arrest as a gesture, but it could be important for setting the tone for a dialogue with the Indians and the Bangladesh leaders involving Mujib's release and the fate of the POWs in India's custody.

On 29 January, Kissinger met with Jha, who was to end his tenure in Washington in April. After an initial discussion on the U.S. military and economic aid to India and Pakistan, their talks shifted to an upcoming dinner planned by the Indian Embassy and issues related to Bangladesh.

Jha: "On the 28th, you are dining with us."

Kissinger: "Are you going to invite Huang Hua down?"

Jha: "I am prepared to!"

Kissinger: "And, Prime Minister Meir. She will be here then."

Jha: "It is too bad we could not have good relations with Israel, but we had to worry about the Moslem reaction or at least neutralize the Moslems on the Pakistan question. There are many Jews in India. They are very happy. One of the oldest synagogues is in Kerala."

Kissinger: "Where does the Indian Christian or Jew fit into the caste system?"

Jha: "The caste tradition is so ingrained that it is carried forward even in other religions. There is a church in Madras with separate sections for Brahmin Christians and non-Brahmin Christians!"

Kissinger: "A very complex but very resilient society!"

Jha: "Yes, we have survived a lot. It is interesting that these castes are now voting for radical reform, for example, the laws against the barriers against the untouchables."

Kissinger: "How do you think Moynihan will do?" Harvard professor Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who later became a U.S. senator from New York, had just been nominated by Nixon as India's ambassador replacing the war-time envoy, Keating.

Jha: "He will do all right. But I will have to warn him. The Indians do not have a profound sense of humor. He should not go by the Indians he meets here! At a dinner I gave for Moynihan, I invited Galbraith, John Sherman Cooper and Keating. Galbraith said that the way to be a successful ambassador is to ignore State Department instructions. Our newspapers reported this with great solemnity."

Kissinger: "But Galbraith meant it!"

Before his departure from Washington on 12 April Jha made a farewell call on Nixon and Kissinger at the White House. The president diplomatically expressed his remorse for his policy during the crisis as a signal of his intention to repair the damage. It was a "hard decision for us. It was, as you know, not one that was in any way designed to create any threat to India," Nixon sought to explain.

For both America and India, Nixon continued, the important thing was to remove "the suspicions and this constant confrontation", which seemed to get into the public press. "We try to dampen down, because for better or worse, let's face it, we are the two biggest democracies in the world, yours and ours. Each of us has much to give to the other. Each of us has an enormous interest in maintaining our freedom and in working towards a more peaceful world. And, for us to be in a position that we are with India, I mean in the minds of many people, many people in the world, that India and the United States are always opposed is not healthy, not a good thing for you. It isn't good for us".

"Now, what we do about it? It isn't just a state visit, the tipping of glasses, the nice, little speeches which we've had, but it's hard, day-to-day work on some of these things. But, I want you to convey to the prime minister that I sent Moynihan there because he's a very close, personal associate," Nixon said, referring to the newly appointed ambassador to India, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who later became a U.S. senator from New York. "He deeply wanted to go. He loves America, but he loves also your country."

"And, I sent him there because I wanted to have a positive, a more positive development in the relations between our countries. We must not allow, now with Pakistan divided, I mean with sincerity, we must not allow differences about that or differences about other things to blind us to the overall interest that we have in a continuing, healthy, constructive relationship.

"Now, let me say this: Not so much in this country, although there are some, but in your country, as you well know, as there are in most countries in the world it's – there's a considerable number, a body of opinion, some in the press, some in the parliament, and the rest who sort of make a profession out of being anti-U.S. I understand that. It's true in Latin America. It's true in Europe and so forth and so on, and the Soviet [Union]. I have no – and I understand it, but the point is that I simply want to say without any sentimentality, although some sentiment might be involved in this – but, basically, not based on that, but based on the interests we share, the interests of the world for people, the interests in the maintenance of the great, free nations requires that India and the United States have a better relationship. And you, you had to take it over a rocky period, and we hope your successor will come here and, perhaps, work cooperatively toward that end because if it goes the other way then each of us will have to look another way, in other directions. And you don't want that, and we don't want it, either. That's the way I would like to – so, I've tried to speak quite frankly about it and I think. Another thing that I did is to say, finally, is this that you get the impression that – which I – from some reports, some speeches that have been made, that – and I realize a lot of this throughout the war in Vietnam, which fortunately is now over and the rest, but none of this – but you get it, and a lot of it throughout India, it reminds us of the India-Pakistan flare up, that President Nixon is anti-Indian and anti-Mrs. Gandhi sort of thing. That's baloney. That is not true. I have never been and never will be, because I want good relations. So, and the impression that whoever is president of the United States is basically against the biggest democracy in the world is not a healthy one to have. It's just [unclear] It's not healthy for the other – for the superpowers to think that, it isn't healthy for your neighbors to think that, it isn't healthy, certainly, for people in this country to think that. And finally, apart from its not being healthy, it's just not true. So, these are some of the things that I hope you take with you, and I hope you take some pleasant memories, too."

Jha: "I can take very happy memories, sir, and I must say throughout a very difficult period one of the things that sustained me was communication I've had with Henry who has known your mind and thinking."

Nixon: "That's right. I know he's talked to you many times."

Jha said that when he was coming to Washington, Gandhi told him his "mission is to make Indo-American relations as good as Indo-Soviet relations, but I do feel that we are now set on a course which can lead to far better relations."

Nixon: "That's right. And, we can find – let me say, you can tell her I will do my part. I'll go more than half way and I have great respect for her not because she is a woman, but because she's a great leader. I have great respect for her because she's a skillful politician."

Kissinger: "What we have set up is, Mr. President, on your instructions, is some more or less regular meetings between Moynihan and senior Indian officials."

Nixon: "I know his successor and I know he's a very bright fellow, but we – without saying anything about it – I'm sorry you're leaving."

Kissinger: "We agree to that. I feel that way."

Nixon: "We won't say it any more."

Kissinger: "And, we know he isn't going to report that."

Nixon: "No. You're right, right, right. Yeah. No, we get along with his successor, but the main thing is that whoever represents, it's pleasant to have somebody that we have as such confidence and respect for. Whoever represents a great country like India we'll get along with them."

# Declassified Documents



Page 419: A 11 February 1971 State Department document shows Sheikh Mujibur Rahman sought American support for an independent East Pakistan.

Page 420-425: Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman told U.S. Ambassador Joseph Farland on 28 February 1971, the Awami League leader favored a confederation with West Pakistan rather than a complete separation of East Pakistan, although he discussed the possibility of an independent East Pakistan with U.S. officials.

Page 426-427: Bangladesh independent leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman sent a secret message to Archer Blood, U.S. Consul General in Dhaka on 10 March 1971 to ask if the United States would be willing to indicate to President Yahya Khan the Awami League's preference for a political solution to the East Pakistan crisis.

Page 428-430: Qazi Zahirul Quaiyum, a parliament member from Comilla, told a U.S. diplomat in Kolkata on 31 July 1971 that Awami League leaders anxiously wanted a political settlement with Pakistan because they feared consequences of an Indo-Pak war and a leftist takeover of the guerrilla movement if the Bangladesh Liberation War prolonged.


Page 431-440: Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, a foreign minister of the Bangladesh government-in-exile in India, held a meeting with a U.S. diplomat at the Bangladesh High Commission in Kolkata on 28 September 1971 for a negotiated settlement with President Yahya Khan of Pakistan.

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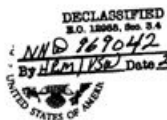
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1. Department commends ConGen Blood for skillful handling Awami League leader Alamgir's approach for U.S. support for independent East Pakistan.
2. We agree recent developments underscore need to accelerate contingency planning in event break up of Pakistan and have already begun such planning, assisted by Policy Appraisal and draft Contingency Papers prepared by Mission and Constituent Posts.
3. Reftel and subsequent messages this subject being handled EXDIS.

END

ROGERS

DRAFTED BY: Cvt  
NEA:CVanHollen:atm  
DRAFTING DATE: 2/10/71 TEL. EXT.: 21030 APPROVED BY: Cvt  
NEA - Christopher Van Hollen  
CLEARANCES: NEA/PAF - Mr. Spengler S/S-O:MR. MALONE



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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARAS 4 & 5)

FROM AMBASSADOR

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN

1. AT 0900 THIS MORNING, FEBRUARY 28, I CALLED UPON SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN AT HIS Dacca RESIDENCE. THE SHEIKH MET ME AT MY CAR AND ESCORTED ME INTO HIS HOME. IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT HE WAS PARTICULARLY PLEASED TO SEE ME AND WELCOMED ME WITH GREAT CORDALITY. AT SAME TIME HE SEEMED SOMEWHAT NERVOUS AND SLIGHTLY APPREHENSIVE AS TO WHAT THE CONVERSATION MIGHT GENERATE. AFTER A FEW PRELIMINARY SOCIAL COMMENTS WHICH INCLUDED HIS REFLECTION THAT "OUR MEETING COMES AT A MOST CRITICAL JUNCTURE IN PAKISTAN HISTORY," HE PRECIPITOUSLY BARGED INTO SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSIONS BY ASKING ME "WHAT DID I THINK ABOUT THE SITUATION?" I TOLD HIM, AS AN INTERESTED OBSERVER, I WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE POLITICAL IMPASSE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST PAKISTAN WHICH ALL SEGMENTS OF THE PRESS HAD BEEN REPORTING AND SUGGESTED THAT SINCE HE, AS CHAIRMAN OF AWAMI LEAGUE, WAS IN A BETTER POSITION THAN I TO INTERPRET CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS, IT WAS MORE APPROPRIATE FOR ME TO REQUEST HIS

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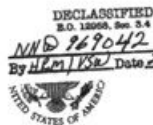
2. THE SHEIKH SAID THAT IN HIS OPINION THE POLITICAL IMPASSE WHICH WAS FACING PAKISTAN WAS NOT DUE SOLELY TO THE MACHINATIONS OF MR. BHUTTO, BUT REPRESENTED A SITUATION WHICH HAD BEEN BROUGHT ABOUT BY "THOSE VERY PEOPLE WHO HAD SUPPORTED AYUB." HE SAID THAT BHUTTO COULD NOT POSSIBLY HAVE ACTED ON HIS OWN SINCE HE HAD LESS THAN AN ORGANIZED POLITICAL PARTY. WITHOUT THE HELP AND LEADERSHIP OF CERTAIN WEST PAKISTANI MILITARY OFFICERS, BHUTTO'S POSITION WOULD BE UNTENABLE. IT WAS PRECISELY BECAUSE OF THIS SITUATION THAT BHUTTO FAVORS EXCESSIVE EXPENDITURES ON MILITARY PREPAREDNESS.

3. IN REPLY TO MY QUESTION AS TO WHETHER OR NOT HE THOUGHT BHUTTO WOULD ATTEND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, HE SAID HE THOUGHT THAT, BECAUSE AWAMI LEAGUE HAD "NOW BOXED HIM IN," BHUTTO'S APPEARANCE COULD BE EXPECTED. HOWEVER, HE SAID HE ANTICIPATED THAT BHUTTO, WHOM HE CHARACTERIZED AS A "CALLOUS COW," WOULD SUBSEQUENTLY CORRAL HIS MNAS AND TAKE OFF FOR THE WEST WING. AT THIS MOMENT THE LIFE STRUGGLE OF BANGLA DESH WOULD BEGIN.

4. I THEN ASKED HIM TO TELL ME JUST HOW FAR APART WERE THE POSITIONS TAKEN BY PPP AND THE AL. HE SAID THAT POSITIONS WERE SO FAR APART THAT HE ANTICIPATED LITTLE OR NO CHANCE OF SECURING A CONSENSUS. MORE SPECIFICALLY, HE SAID THAT AWAMI LEAGUE AND HE AS ITS "CHOSEN LEADER" COULD NOT AND WOULD NOT COMPROMISE ON SIX POINT PROGRAM WHICH HE "HAD MADE A PART OF LIFE OF EAST PAKISTAN FOR A PERIOD OF NOW SOME TEN YEARS." HE SAID THAT IT WAS BHUTTO'S OBJECTIVE TO BECOME THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND BE GIVEN THE RIGHT TO SELECT PAKISTAN'S PRESIDENT. THE SHEIKH COMMENTED ON BHUTTO'S FOREIGN POLICIES WHICH HE SAID WERE ABHORRENT TO HIM, CITING BHUTTO'S LOVE FOR COMMUNIST CHINA AND HIS INTRANSIGENT POSITION VIS-A-VIS INDIA. THE SHEIKH REFLECTED AT LENGTH UPON HIS ANTI-COMMUNIST POSITION AND THE DANGERS THAT CHINA PORTENDED TO THE AREA. AS TO INDIA, IT WAS IMPERATIVE THAT BANGLA DESH RE-ESTABLISH GOOD RELATIONS AND REOPEN THE HISTORIC

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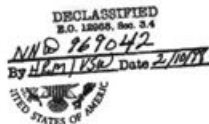
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TRADE ROUTES IN THE AREA. HE OPINED THAT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WHAT BHUTTO WANTED AND WHAT THE PEOPLE OF BANGLA DESH DEMANDED APPEARED TO BE INSURMOUNTABLE.

5. WITH THE CONCEPT AS POINT OF DEPARTURE, SHEIKH INOULGED IN A 10-MINUTE SPEECH WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN A PART OF HIS POLITICAL ORATORY, SAYING THAT THE PEOPLE OF "HIS COUNTRY," WERE BEHIND HIM TO A MAN, THAT HE HAD THE SMALL HARD CORE OF COMMUNISTS VERY MUCH ON THE RUN AS WAS EVIDENCED BY BHASHANI'S PRESENT POLITICAL DISARRAY. HE SAID THAT THE COMMUNISTS HAD KILLED THREE OF HIS LEADERS AND THAT HE IN TURN HAD PROMISED THE COMMUNISTS THAT FOR EVERY AWAMI LEAGUER KILLED, HE WOULD KILL THREE OF THEIRS AND THAT "THIS WE HAVE DONE." AFTER NOTING THE TIME HE HAD SPENT IN PRISON AT HANDS OF WEST PAKISTANI LEADERSHIP, HE SAID THAT HE HAD NO FEAR WHATSOEVER OF "FACING THE BULLET" IF UNITY COULD NOT BE MAINTAINED. HE DRAMATICALLY POINTED OUT THAT HE WAS UNAFRAID OF BEING JAILED OR "HACKED TO PIECES," AND THAT HE WOULD NOT DEVIATE FROM THE MANDATE WHICH HAD BEEN THE WILL OF HIS PEOPLE. HE CULMINATED THIS MONOLOGUE BY SAYING THAT HE DID NOT WANT SEPARATION BUT RATHER HE WANTED A FORM OF CONFEDERATION IN WHICH THE PEOPLE OF BANGLA DESH WOULD GET THEIR JUST AND RIGHTFUL SHARE OF FOREIGN AID, AND NOT A MERE "20 PERCENT AS HERETOFORE. WITH 60 PERCENT OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE COMING FROM MY COUNTRY, HOW CAN ISLAMABAD JUSTIFY THE CRUMBS WHICH THEY HAVE THROWN US?" THE SHEIKH RHETORICALLY ASKED.  
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AMCONSUL LAHORE

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FROM: AMBASSADOR

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN

6. MOVING TO THE SUBJECT OF FOREIGN AID, THE SHEIKH SAID THAT CURRENTLY PAKISTAN WAS IN A DANGEROUS FINANCIAL CONDITION WITH ITS FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES VIRTUALLY EXHAUSTED. HE SAID THAT IN A SENSE THIS WAS A BLESSING IN DISGUISE FOR BANGLA DESH SINCE WEST PAKISTAN DID NOT HAVE THE FINANCIAL POWER TO SUBJUGATE HIS PARTY. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT PRESENTLY WEST PAKISTAN WAS BEGGING JAPAN FOR SUBSTANTIAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND THAT IF THIS WAS RECEIVED, "THEN THEY WILL BANG US." IT WAS THEN THAT THE SHEIKH POINTEDLY ASKED ME IF THE U.S. AND THE CONSORTIUM WOULD SUPPORT THE RE-BUILDING OF BANGLA DESH. I TOLD HIM THAT AS A POLITICAL LEADER HE SHOULD RECOGNIZE THE FACT THAT U.S. HAD BEEN AND CONTINUES TO BE INTERESTED IN THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF THE SUB-CONTINENT. I POINTED OUT, HOWEVER, THAT THERE WERE TWO LIMITATIONS TO OUR ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AS WELL AS TO THE PROGRAM OF THE CONSORTIUM: (1) THE AMOUNT OF FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE WAS TODAY MUCH MORE LIMITED THAN IN THE PAST; (2) AID RECEIVING PROJECTS OF NECESSITY HAD TO

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BE MORE CAREFULLY EVALUATED AND DEVELOPED. THIS REQUIRED MORE INDIGENOUS TECHNICIANS AND PUBLIC SERVANTS KNOWLEDGEABLE NOT ONLY IN THE PROJECTS THEMSELVES BUT SKILLED IN THE UTILIZATION OF FUNDS AND PROJECT ADMINISTRATION. I NOTED MY CONCERN THAT THERE HAD BEEN LESS THAN FULL UTILIZATION OF RESOURCES MADE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE IN EAST PAKISTAN FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AND THE PAUCITY OF TRAINED PEOPLE.

7. THE SHEIKH THEN DESCRIBED AT LENGTH WHAT HE CONSIDERED TO BE EAST PAKISTAN'S CHANCES OF BECOMING A VIABLE AREA, POINTING OUT THE GREAT RESERVES OF GAS AVAILABLE NOT ONLY FOR LOCAL CONSUMPTION BY A PETROCHEMICAL INDUSTRY BUT ALSO FOR EXPORT TO INDIA. HE SAID THAT UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP BANGLA DESH WOULD BE SELF-SUFFICIENT IN FOOD WITHIN TWO YEARS, THE BORO CROP BEING ONE OF HIS PRIMARY INTERESTS. WHEN I POINTED OUT TO HIM THE ALMOST UNBELIEVABLE BIRTHRATE IN EAST PAKISTAN, THE SHEIKH SAID THAT BIRTH CONTROL WOULD BE ONE OF HIS MAIN OBJECTIVES SAYING THAT HE COULD LEAD THE PEOPLE IN THEIR EFFORT TO DECREASE THE SIZE OF INDIVIDUAL FAMILIES WHEREAS THEY COULD NOT BE PUSHED AS WAS THE EFFORT TODAY.

8. SPEAKING IN A THOROUGHLY SERIOUS MOOD, THE SHEIKH SAID THAT THOUGH HE HESITATED TO DO SO HE FELT HE SHOULD POINT OUT THAT THE U.S. HAD A REPUTATION FOR DESERTING THEIR FRIENDS WHEN DISAGREEABLE PROBLEMS AROSE. HE SAID THAT IN HIS OPINION DISAGREEABLE PROBLEMS WERE GOING TO ARISE IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD WHICH AGAIN WOULD PUT THE UNITED STATES TO TEST. I SUGGESTED TO THE SHEIKH THAT I FELT THAT HIS OPINION WAS ENTIRELY TOO PAT AND I WOULD BE HAPPY TO DISCUSS THE AMERICAN ROLE IN SUPPORT OF ITS FRIENDS AT ANOTHER TIME. I ADDED THAT I FELT SOME CREDENCE SHOULD BE GIVEN TO THE FACT THAT THE U.S. FINANCIALLY ASSISTED PAKISTAN TO THE TUNE OF SOMETHING IN EXCESS OF FOUR AND A HALF BILLION DOLLARS. THE SHEIKH'S RETORT WAS THAT "IF THE U.S. WOULD GIVE ME ONE BILLION DOLLARS, I WOULD MAKE A PROSPEROUS BANGLA DESH A BULWARK FOR DEMOCRACY."

9. ALL THESE COMMENTS WERE BUT BACKGROUND TO THE KEY QUESTION WHICH THE SHEIKH WISHED TO ASK. I.E., WHAT IS

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THE POLICY OF THE U.S. TOWARD PAKISTAN? WITH THE UT-  
MOST CARE I DELINEATED THE U.S. POLICY, PRECISELY IN  
ACCORDANCE WITH THE POLICY GUIDANCE POSITION SET FORTH  
IN STATE 35534, AND I IN NO WAY CONVEYED A SENSE OF  
CONCERN RE PAKISTAN'S FUTURE IN SUCH A MANNER AS TO  
SUGGEST UNALTERABLE U.S. OPPOSITION TO BENGALI ASPIRA-  
TIONS. I DID, HOWEVER, POINT OUT AS AFORESAID THAT  
FOREIGN AID WAS NO LONGER A CORNUCOPIA FROM WHICH  
FLOWED AN UNENDING STREAM OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR  
USE IN SOLVING THE ILLS OF THE WORLD. WITHOUT PUTTING  
IT IN A FORM OF A QUESTION THE SHEIKH THEN SAID THAT  
IT BEHOVED ALL THE FRIENDS OF BANGLA DESH TO EXERT  
MAXIMUM INFLUENCE ON "THOSE WHO WOULD USE THE FORCE  
OF ARMS TO KEEP MY PEOPLE IN A COLONIAL STATUS." HE  
SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN A STUDENT OF WORLD AFFAIRS LONG  
ENOUGH TO KNOW THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER AID-CONTRI-  
BUTING COUNTRIES COULD EXERT THIS TYPE OF INFLUENCE  
IF THEY DESIRED TO DO SO. SINCE NO QUESTION WAS  
POSED, THE NECESSITY FOR AN ANSWER WAS OBIATED, BUT  
IT MAY REQUIRE AN ANSWER SOONER THAN WE EXPECT, AND  
HENCE SHOULD BE GIVEN SOME SERIOUS THOUGHT. I HAD  
ANTICIPATED THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE SHEIKH WOULD  
RAISE THE MATTER OF RECOGNITION SINCE HE HAD EVIDENCED  
INTEREST IN THIS SUBJECT AS HERETOFORE REPORTED;  
HOWEVER, HE DID NOT DO SO.

10. I EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT I WOULD HAVE AN OPPOR-  
TUNITY OF TALKING TO HIM AGAIN AFTER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS  
HAD PASSED, SINCE MANY OF THE CURRENT VARIABLES OR UN-  
KNOWN QUANTITIES WOULD THEN BE KNOWN AND CLARIFIED.  
HE SAID THAT HE HAD PLEASANTLY ANTICIPATED THIS MEETING  
TODAY AND WOULD LOOK FORWARD WITH THE GREATEST OF  
PLEASURE TO MEETING WITH ME AT ANY TIME. FURTHER, HE  
WISHED TO ASSURE ME NOT ONLY OF HIS OWN PERSONAL FRIEND-  
SHIP, BUT THAT OF THE PEOPLE OF BANGLA DESH FOR THE  
PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES.

11. THE CONVERSATION WHICH EXTENDED FOR A PERIOD OF  
LITTLE OVER ONE HOUR WAS CONCLUDED ON THIS MOST AMICABLE  
VEIN AND THE SHEIKH ESCORTED ME TO BY AUTOMOBILE THROUGH  
A LINE OF HIS ARDENT SUPPORTERS. GP-3.  
BLOOD:

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SECRET 936

PAGE: 01 Dacca 00697 101343Z

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ACTION: SS-45

INFO: OCT-01 SSO-00 NSCE-00 CCO-00 /046. W 012616

O P: 101205Z MAR 71  
FM: AMCONSUL Dacca  
TO: SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2847  
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
INFO: RUH  
SK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK: PRIORITY 434  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMCONSUL KARACHI  
AMCONSUL LAHORE  
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

*45*  
*Dacca 697*  
*3-10-71*

SECRET Dacca 697

EXDIS:

BANGKOK: FOR: AMBASSADOR: FARLAND

SUBJECT: PAKI POLITICAL CRISIS

REF: ISLAMABAD: 1975, 1976

1) ALAMGIR RAHMAN (PROTECT) CAME TO SEE ME THIS MORNING WITH WHAT HE SAID WAS MESSAGE FROM MUJIB. ACCORDING ALAMGIR, MUJIB HAD WANTED YAHYA TO COME TO Dacca FOR TALKS AND WAS GREATLY RELIEVED AT NEWS THAT YAHYA WAS IN FACT COMING. MUJIB WANTED VERY MUCH TO WORK OUT WITH YAHYA SOME POLITICAL SETTLEMENT THAT WOULD AVOID BLOODSHED, SATISFY BENGALI ASPIRATIONS, AND PRESERVE SOME VESTIGE OF LINK WITH PAKISTAN. ALAMGIR OPINED THAT IT IS NOW TOO LATE TO TALK IN TERMS OF SIX-POINT CONSTITUTION BUT PERHAPS SOME SOLUTION CAN BE FOUND ALONG LINES OF CONFEDERATION WITH SEPARATE CONSTITUTIONS FOR EAST AND WEST PAKISTAN, AND ONE ARMY AND ONE FOREIGN MINISTRY.

2) MUJIB'S QUESTION, SAID ALAMGIR, WAS: "DOES THE UNITED STATES WANT TO SEE MILITARY CONFRONTATION WITH

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E.O. 12958, Sec. 2.4  
NND 969001  
By *WLSW* Date *11/24/97*

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THE PROSPECT OF EVENTUAL COMMUNIST DOMINATION OF BENGAL OR WOULD IT PREFER A POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THE CURRENT CRISIS? I TOLD ALAMGIR THAT MUJIB'S QUESTION PUT THAT WAY WAS EASY TO ANSWER. WE NATURALLY HOPE FOR A PEACEFUL POLITICAL SOLUTION IN LIEU OF BLOODSHED. WE WERE GRATIFIED TO LEARN THAT MUJIB IS ALSO THINKING IN THESE TERMS, AND WE INTERPRET YAHYA'S WILLINGNESS TO COME TO Dacca AS EVIDENCE HE TOO IS DESIROUS OF ACHIEVING A PEACEFUL SOLUTION. WE HOPE BOTH SIDES WOULD APPROACH TALKS IN SPIRIT OF COMPROMISE.

3) ALAMGIR THEN SAID MUJIB WANTED TO KNOW IF UNITED STATES WOULD BE WILLING TO INDICATE TO YAHYA OUR HOPE FOR POLITICAL SOLUTION TO CURRENT CRISIS. I SAID I DID NOT KNOW IF THIS THOUGHT HAD BEEN CONVEYED TO YAHYA IN ISLAMABAD BUT I WOULD UNDERTAKE TO SUGGEST TO CHARGE THAT IF APPROPRIATE OCCASION PRESENTED ITSELF BEFORE YAHYA'S DEPARTURE HE MIGHT NOTE TO YAHYA OUR HOPE FOR POLITICAL SOLUTION TO PROBLEMS FACING PAKISTAN.

4) COMMENT: I RECOGNIZE OF COURSE THAT EXPRESSION OF HOPE FOR "POLITICAL SOLUTION" AS DISTINCT FROM "PEACEFUL" SOLUTION CARRIES IMPLICATION THAT WE WOULD NOT BE HAPPY ABOUT MILITARY REPRESSION AS A SOLUTION TO CRISIS. NONETHELESS GIVEN URGENCY OF SITUATION I WOULD HOPE WE COULD BE SOMEWHAT MORE POSITIVE IN THIS REGARD.

5) OUR ANALYSIS OF PROSPECTS FOR POLITICAL COMPROMISE SOLUTION WILL FOLLOW BY SEPT 24 0413Z  
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E.O. 12958, Sec. 5.4  
NND 967001  
By 165 Date 11/24/92



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TELEGRAM

SECRET 954

PAGE 01 CALCUT 02230 010746Z

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ACTION SS-45

INFO OCT-01 SSO-00 CEO-00 NSCE-00 /046 W

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FM AMCONSUL CALCUTTA  
TO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE  
SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2150

SECRET CALCUTTA 2230

EXDIS

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH AL REP

REFERENCE: NEW DELHI 12213 Pol 30-2 PAK

SUMMARY: IN DISCUSSION WITH CONGEN POLOFF, AWAMI LEAGUE MNA SAID AL LEADERS ANXIOUS FOR POLITICAL SETTLEMENT WITH GOP AND PREPARED RECEDE FROM TOTAL INDEPENDENCE DEMAND. THEY FEAR CONSEQUENCES OF INDO-PAK WAR AND OF EXTREMIST TAKEOVER OF BANGLADESH MOVEMENT IF GUERRILLA STRUGGLE PROTRACTED. HE SUGGESTED US-INDIA-PAK-AL SUMMIT MEETING, BUT INSISTED MUJIB PARTICIPATION ESSENTIAL PREREQUISITE. HE STRESSED AL FAITH IN US AS ONLY POWER THAT CAN SAVE SITUATION. EMD SUMMARY.

1. ON JULY 30, REPRESENTATIVE OF AWAMI LEAGUE MNA FROM CUNILLA, QAZI ZAHIRUL QAIYUM (PROTECT), CALLED AT CONGEN TO REQUEST APPOINTMENT FOR QAIYUM WITH CONSUL GENERAL. WHEN TOLD THIS NOT POSSIBLE, HE SAID QAIYUM WILLING MEET WITH ANY OTHER OFFICER. POLOFF SAW QAIYUM JULY 31. (REFTEL NOT RECEIVED AT TIME OF MEETING).

2. QAIYUM GAVE BACKGROUND OF AL MOVEMENT UP THROUGH ELECTIONS AND EVENTS OF MARCH 25. HE SAID AL WAS OPENLY PRO-INDIAN AND PRO-AMERICAN. NOW CONTACT HAD BEEN LOST WITH AMERICANS AND HE HAD BEEN SELECTED BY BANGLADESH FOREIGN MINISTER KHANDAKAR MOSHTAQUE AHMED TO ATTEMPT REESTABLISH IT. HE SAID BD FOREIGN SECRETARY ALAM INSTRUCTED SOME TIME AGO BY BD FOREIGN MINISTER TO CONTACT AMERICANS, BUT ALAM UNCERTAIN HOW BEST TO ARRANGE THIS. HE GAVE NO INDIC

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PAGE 03 CALCUT 02230 010746Z

STANDING AND APPROVAL OF U.S. EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN A DIALOGUE WITH YAHYA GOVERNMENT. HE SUGGESTED, HOWEVER, THAT BEST AND PERHAPS ONLY WAY TO SOLVE PRESENT IMPASSE WOULD BE TO HAVE PRESIDENT NIXON, YAHYA, PRIME MINISTER GANDHI AND SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN MEET TOGETHER (SIMILAR TO THE TASHKENT CONFERENCE). HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT MUCH SPADEWORK WOULD BE REQUIRED BEFORE SUCH MEETING TOOK PLACE, BUT SAID THAT THERE WERE MEN OF GOOD WILL AVAILABLE ON ALL SIDES TO DO THIS WORK. HE SAID AL WOULD BE WILLING TO RETREAT CONSIDERABLY FROM POSITIONS (ON COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE, ETC.) TAKEN SINCE MARCH 1971. FOR EXAMPLE, HE FORESAW POSSIBILITY OF SETTLEMENT IN WHICH PORTIONS OF PAKISTAN ARMY WOULD REMAIN IN EAST BENGAL SUPPLEMENTED BY U.N. FORCES TO INSURE NON-BENGALI INTERESTS ARE PROTECTED. (THE ACCEPTABLE PAKISTAN ARMY UNITS WOULD BE THE FIVE OR SIX EAST BENGAL REGIMENT BATTALIONS NOW IN WEST PAKISTAN PLUS ONE OR TWO BALUCH AND ONE OR TWO PATHAN BATTALIONS.)

7. QAIYUM EMPHASIZED THAT SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN MUST PLAY KEY ROLE IN ANY POSSIBLE SETTLEMENT, AS ONLY MUJIB CAPABLE OF HOLDING EAST BENGAL PEOPLE TOGETHER. IF MUJIB IS TRIED AND EXECUTED, ALL HOPE FOR RESOLUTION OF CURRENT IMPASSE WILL BE LOST. FOR THIS REASON QAIYUM ASKED THAT USG DO EVERYTHING IN ITS POWER TO INSURE SHEIKH MUJIB'S SAFETY.

8. COMMENT. QAIYUM IMPRESSED POLOFF AS SOBER, RESPONSIBLE MAN AND WE HAVE NO REASON DOUBT HIS BONA FIDES. (HE HAD BANGLADESH ID CARD AND WE HAVE BIO DATA ON HIM FROM CONGEN Dacca.) WE ARE STRUCK BY MODERATION OF HIS VIEWS AS CONTRASTED WITH STRIDENT TONE OF "OFFICIAL" BANGLADESH PROPAGANDA. WE THINK IT PLAUSIBLE THAT AL LEADERSHIP, LOOKING AHEAD TO GRIM ALTERNATIVES THAT WILL FACE THEM IF PRESENT CHAOTIC SITUATION CONTINUES, ARE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING COMPROMISE SETTLEMENT AND ARE TRYING ESTABLISH CONTACT WITH USG WITH THIS IN MIND. ALTHOUGH QAIYUM CLAIMS HIS SENTIMENTS REPRESENT CONSENSUS OF ELECTED AL LEADERSHIP, BELIEVE IT IMPORTANT TO DETERMINE WHETHER IN FACT TOP LEADERS EQUALLY MODERATELY INCLINED. POLOFF TOLD QAIYUM HE WOULD OF COURSE REPORT MEETING BUT DID NOT ENCOURAGE HIM TO EXPECT ANY SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE. QAIYUM INDICATED HE WOULD CALL AGAIN LATE NEXT WEEK. BELIEVE WE SHOULD CONTINUE SEE HIM ON DISCREET, LOW-KEY BASIS.

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PAGE 03 CALCUT 02230 010746Z

STANDING AND APPROVAL OF U.S. EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN A DIALOGUE WITH YAHYA GOVERNMENT. HE SUGGESTED, HOWEVER, THAT BEST AND PERHAPS ONLY WAY TO SOLVE PRESENT IMPASSE WOULD BE TO HAVE PRESIDENT NIXON, YAHYA, PRIME MINISTER GANDHI AND SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN MEET TOGETHER (SIMILAR TO THE TASHKENT CONFERENCE). HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT MUCH SPADEWORK WOULD BE REQUIRED BEFORE SUCH MEETING TOOK PLACE, BUT SAID THAT THERE WERE MEN OF GOOD WILL AVAILABLE ON ALL SIDES TO DO THIS WORK. HE SAID AL WOULD BE WILLING TO RETREAT CONSIDERABLY FROM POSITIONS (ON COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE, ETC.) TAKEN SINCE MARCH 1971. FOR EXAMPLE, HE FORESAW POSSIBILITY OF SETTLEMENT IN WHICH PORTIONS OF PAKISTAN ARMY WOULD REMAIN IN EAST BENGAL SUPPLEMENTED BY U.N. FORCES TO INSURE NON-BENGALI INTERESTS ARE PROTECTED. (THE ACCEPTABLE PAKISTAN ARMY UNITS WOULD BE THE FIVE OR SIX EAST BENGAL REGIMENT BATTALIONS NOW IN WEST PAKISTAN PLUS ONE OR TWO BALUCH AND ONE OR TWO PATHAN BATTALIONS.)

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ACTION: Amembassy NEW DELHI  
" ISLAMABAD  
" DACCA

STATE

OC/T - Please repeat CALCUTTA 2575, NODIS, dated  
September 29, 1971, to above addressees.

NODIS REVIEW

Col. A - Caption removed:
Transferred to O/FADBC
Col. B - Transferred to O/FADBC
with additional access
controlled by S/S
Col. C - Caption removed:
Transferred by S/S

Reviewed by: Ambassador W. Wilmon, II  
Date: 9/18/71

PL 27 India-PAK

DRAFTED BY: S/S:RHM:al  
DRAFTING DATE: 9/29/71  
TEL. EXT.: 23126  
APPROVED BY: S/S - Robert H. Miller

CLEARANCES

SECRET  
Classification

FORM 4-68 DS-322



Department of State

SECRET

**TELEGRAM**

CONTROL: 7826Q  
RECD: 29 SEP 10 53Z

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FM AMCONSUL CALCUTTA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 228Z  
BT  
SECRET SECTION 1003 CALCUTTA 2575  
NODIS

DEPT-PLEASE PASS NEW DELHI ISLAMABAD DACCA

SUBJECT: CONTACT WITH BANGLADESH REPS - MEETING WITH MUSHTAQ

REFERENCE: CALCUTTA 2575

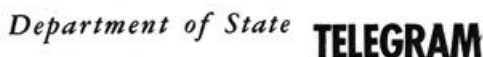
1. SUMMARY: CONGEN POLITICAL OFFICER HELD 90 MINUTE DISCUSSION WITH BD "FONMIN" MUSHTAQ AHMED SEPTEMBER 28. MUSHTAQ PLACED BLAME FOR EVENTS IN EAST PAKISTAN SINCE MARCH 25 SQUARELY ON USG BECAUSE OF ITS CONTINUED SUPPORT OF GOP. HE NONETHELESS SAID IT FERVENT DESIRE OF BDG TO REGAIN CLOSE FRIENDSHIP WITH UNITED STATES. HE HOPED USG WOULD FIND IT IN ITS OWN INTERESTS TO HELP ARRANGE FOR PEACEFUL INDEPENDENCE FOR BANGLADESH. HE WARNED THAT TIME IS RUNNING OUT FOR USG TO STEP IN AND HELP AVOID LEFTIST TAKEOVER OF BD. HE HAD NO DESIRE TO TALK DIRECTLY TO GOP BUT REQUESTED USG TO SPEAK TO GOP ON BEHALF OF BDG. HE ASKED FOR OFFICIAL RESPONSE TO HIS REQUESTS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. HE EXPRESSED DESIRE TO DISCREETLY MAINTAIN DIRECT CHANNEL WITH POLOFF AND SAID HE ASSUMED THERE WOULD BE NO OTHER CHANNEL HIMSELF, ALTHOUGH HE KNEW OTHER WELL-INTENTIONED BD LEADERS HAD AND MIGHT IN FUTURE CONTACT USG REPS IN EFFORT DETERMINE "MIND OF AMERICANS." END SUMMARY.

2. POLOFF RECEIVED URGENT CALL FROM BD "HIGH COMMISSIONER" HUSSAIN ALI SEPTEMBER 28, WHO ASKED IF POLOFF WISHED TO TALK TO BD "FONMIN" MUSHTAQ AHMED. POLOFF RESPONDED THAT HE WOULD BE AGREEABLE TO DO SO IF MUSHTAQ WISHED TO TALK TO HIM. ALI SAID MUSHTAQ DID, AND SCHEDULED EVENING APPOINTMENT AT BD "HIGH COMMISSIONER" POLOFF WAS MET BY ALI, WHOM HE HAD KNOWN PREVIOUSLY, AND INTRODUCED TO MUSHTAQ, WHO ARRIVED ABOUT FIVE MINUTES AFTER POLOFF. ALI THEN LEFT MUSHTAQ AND POLOFF ALONE FOR

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-2- S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 CALCUTTA 2575, NODIS, SEP 29

HOUR'S PRIVATE DISCUSSION OUTLINED BELOW, AND REJOINED FOR  
LAST THIRTY MINUTES.

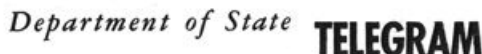
3. MUSHTAQ OPENED CONVERSATION BY ASKING POLOFF FOR PRECISE OUTLINE OF USG POLICY VIS-A-VIS BD, AND WOUND UP BY ASKING, "WHY ARE YOU KILLING US?" POLOFF REPLIED THAT HE HAD NOT COME TO ARGUE USG POLICY WITH MUSHTAQ BECAUSE THAT WOULD MERELY INVOLVE LONG RANGE AND POLEMICS. RATHER, HE HAD COME TO HEAR FROM "FRIENDLY LATTER'S" VIEWS ON PRESENT AND FUTURE POLICY AND SITUATION. AS HE HAS NO ESTIMATE OF PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE, MUSHTAQ QUICKLY AGREED THAT "PROPAGANDA ARGUMENTS ARE USELESS," AND ADDED THAT HE IS PRACTICAL AND REALISTIC MAN.

4. MUSHTAQ SAID HE HAD WANTED TO TALK TO USG REP FOR SOME TIME, BUT HAD BEEN UNABLE TO THINK OF SUITABLE WAY TO DO SO. DURING HIS INTERVIEW WITH THIS CORRESPONDENT SEPTEMBER 26 (SEE CALCUTTA 2564) HE HAD QUESTIONED COGINN ABOUT US POLICY. LATTER HAD TRIED TO GIVE MUSHTAQ BRIEF OUTLINE, BUT STRONGLY SUGGESTED THAT IF MUSHTAQ REALLY WANTED TO KNOW, HE GET IN TOUCH WITH US CONSUL GENERAL IN POLOF. MUSHTAQ SAID HE HAD DECIDED THIS MIGHT BE USEFUL AND ASKED HOSSAIN ALI TO CALL POLOFF.

5. POLOFF ASKED WHAT BDG EXPECTED FROM USG. MUSHTAQ REPLIED, "STOP HELPING YAHYA. STOP HELPING KILL MY INNOCENT PEOPLE. YOU HAVE PRACTICALLY FORCED MY PEOPLE INTO THE LAP OF THE EXTREMISTS. WHAT IS OUR CRIME? YOU MUST PUT PRESSURE ON YAHYA TO STOP. YOU HAVE MINIMIZED MY POPULATION. ONE MILLION OF THEM ARE DEAD. ANOTHER NINE MILLION HAVE BEEN FORCED TO FLEE TO INDIA AND BURMA, WHERE THEY ARE NOT WANTED. YOU HAVE DONE THIS WITH YOUR ARMS, YOUR MONEY, YOUR FOOD, YOUR TRANSPORT, YOUR MEDICINES -- ALL OF WHICH HAVE BEEN USED BY YAHYA'S TROOPS AGAINST US. I DON'T LIKE TO SPEAK THIS WAY TO A REPRESENTATIVE OF MY OLD FRIENDS, BUT YOU ASKED ME WHAT WE EXPECT FROM THE GREAT DEMOCRATIC UNITED STATES. I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND IF I SPEAK FRANKLY. I HAVE STUDIED YOUR POLICY. YOU ARE NOT WEAK. YOU CAN TELL YAHYA 'DON'T USE OUR ARMS.' ONLY YOU CAN DO THAT." WHEN POLOFF DEMURED THAT PAKISTAN HAD BULK OF ARMS FROM CHINA, MUSHTAQ REPLIED, "THE CHINESE SAY YOU HAVE SUPPLIED MOST OF THE ARMS TO PAKISTAN."

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-3- S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 CALCUTTA 2575, NODIS, SEP 29

6. MUSHTAQ CONTINUED THAT HE WAS NOT RPY NOT A COMMUNIST, NOR A COMMUNIST SYMPATHIZER. HE SAID, "I AM A CONSCIOUS ANTI-COMMUNIST. I AM A MUCH MORE DEDICATED ANTI-COMMUNIST THAN ORDINARY ANTI-COMMUNISTS." HE SAID US COULD, BY FOLLOWING PRESENT POLICY, HELP EXTREMISTS WIN OUT IN SD AND DENY AL ITS DEMOCRATIC VICTORY. HE SAID, "IT IS THE UNITED STATES UPON WHOM YAHYA NOW LEANS. IF YOU WANT TO, YOU CAN MAKE HIM SEE AL IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO."

7. TURNING TO RECENT EVENTS, MUSHQAQ SAID BD WAS FORCED INTO ACCEPTING COMMUNISTS ON CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE. HE SAID FIRST MOTION WAS TO FORM WAR COUNCIL, WHICH HE AND OTHER LEADERS REJECTED. NEXT, THEY WANTED TO FORM A LIBERATION FRONT, WHICH I ALSO RESISTED AS HARD AS I COULD," HE SAID. BUT HE WAS "FORCED" FINALLY TO ACCEPT "LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR," THE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE. HE SAID COMMITTEE WAS ONLY ADVISORY BODY AT PRESENT TIME, BUT ADDED, "WE WILL HAVE TO ACCEPT MORE IN THE NEXT SIX MONTHS IF YOU DON'T INTERVENE." HE SAID, "WE WANT YOUR SHOULDER TO LEAN ON."

8. POLOFF AT THIS JUNCTURE REVIEWED SEQUENCE OF EVENTS AS WE KNEW THEM, I.E., WE WERE INFORMED BY BD SOURCE THAT BD3 (AND SPECIALLY MUSHTAQ) HAD WANTED TO SPEAK TO US IN EARLY AUGUST AND HAD EXPRESSED DESIRE TO TALK TO US IN MID-AUGUST. POLOFF SAID CONGEN HAD REPORTED ALL THIS TO WASHINGTON, AND THAT IN LATE AUGUST SUBSTANCE HAD BEEN CONVEYED TO YAMHA, WHO HAD EXPRESSED INTEREST. IN PASSING WORD OF THIS INTEREST TO MUSHTAQ, POLOFF WAS MERELY ACTING AS MESSENGER, NOT PROPOSING NEGOTIATIONS. HE WOULD BE WILLING RELAY ANY WORD FROM MUSHTAQ.

9. POLOFF'S REMARKS CAUSED MUSHTAQ TO PAUSE AND THINK FOR A MOMENT, AND THEN HE REPLIED THAT HE HAD ALWAYS WISHED TO TALK TO "UNITED STATES, OUR GREAT FRIENDS," AS WAS EVIDENT BY HIS PRESENCE, IN HOPES THAT IT IS STILL NOT TOO LATE TO ASK FOR BT

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LIST BE PREFACED WITH STATEMENT THAT IT IS MERELY GENERAL STATEMENT OF BDG PRINCIPLES AND NOT RPT NOT CAREFULLY CONSIDERED PRECISE WORDING TO BE QUIBBLED ABOUT LATER. HE SAID HE WOULD NOT RPT NOT WISH TO BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR HIS PRECISE WORDING BECAUSE HE IS INEXPERIENCED IN DIPLOMACY AND WOULD HAVE TO OBTAIN CABINET APPROVAL FOR EXACT WORDING AT LATER DATE, IF CIRCUMSTANCES WARRANTED. LIST OF BDG DESIRES FOLLOWS:

- (A) FULL INDEPENDENCE FOR BD
- (B) RELEASE SHEIKH MUJIB
- (C) AFTER INDEPENDENCE, MASSIVE, LONG-TERM ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FROM USG TO HELP RECONSTRUCT NATION AND QUICK INPUT HUMANITARIAN AID FROM USG TO GET PEOPLE BACK ON FEET
- (D) AFTER INDEPENDENCE, ESTABLISHMENT OF NORMAL DIPLOMATIC AND BUSINESS RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN
- (E) DETAILS AND MODALITIES OF PLANS FOR HANDING OVER NATION TO BD LEADERS AND WITHDRAWAL PAK ARMY TO BE WORKED OUT IN CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN BDG, USG AND GOP
- (F) PRELIMINARY STEPS TO BE DISCUSSED WITH GOP VIA USG
- (G) SOLE CHANNEL AT PRESENT TO BE FOMMIN TO POLOFF VIA "HIGH COMMISSIONER."

MUSHTAQ CAPPED OUTLINE OF LIST BY SAYING USG "MUST TAKE THE LEAD, OTHERWISE THE RUSSIANS WILL DO SO." HE SAID HE AND OTHER BDG LEADERS PREFERRED THAT USG TAKE ACTIVE ROLE AND THAT MOST OF THEM WERE APPREHENSIVE OF SOVIET ROLE, "ALTHOUGH CONFIDENCE IN THE UNITED STATES IS NOW A LITTLE SHAKY." HE SAID IF IT TURNS OUT TO BE IMPOSSIBLE TO REACH PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT, BDG WOULD PURSUE WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE UNTIL IT WON, "DESPITE YOUR GUNS." HE SAID HE REALIZED PROSPECTS FOR RADICALIZATION OF BD MOVEMENT IN SUCH AN EVENTUALITY AND KNEW SOVIETS NOW TRYING TO TAKE IT OVER BUT SAID BDG HAD NO OTHER CHOICE.

12. IN RESPONSE POLOFF'S REMARK THAT HE NOTED MUSHTAQ HAD WELCOMED INDO-SOVIET TREATY, FOMMIN SAID, "YOU ONLY READ THE FIRST SENTENCE. READ THE LAST ONE." (LAST SENTENCE SAYS,

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"WE ARDENTLY HOPE THAT THIS TREATY WILL BE HELPFUL IN FULFILLING THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE SMALL AND EMERGING NATIONS DESPITE THE CRUDE BELLICOSITY OF MEN LIKE YAHYA KHAN OF PAKISTAN." HE ADDED, "I AM A REALISTIC MAN. I CAN LIVE WITH WHATEVER IS NECESSARY FOR US TO WIN."

13. AT THIS JUNCTURE, MUSHTAQ CALLED IN HOSSAIN ALI AND ASKED HIM TO NOTE DOWN LIST OF BDG "DESIRES" HE HAD GIVEN POLOFF AND READ THEM BACK, "SO THAT WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER FULLY." WHEN ALI HAD FINISHED, MUSHTAQ SAID, "ALL THIS BOILS DOWN TO ONE CENTRAL POINT. IF THE UNITED STATES WANTS TO DO IT, IT CAN DO IT. THE ONUS IS ON THE UNITED STATES, IF THE UNITED STATES IS INTERESTED IN HELPING US ACHIEVE OUR DEMOCRATIC FREEDOM. TIME IS RUNNING AGAINST US. BUT FIRST, THE UNITED STATES MUST MAKE UP ITS MIND WHETHER IT WANTS TO HELP BANGLADESH." HE NOTED (BUT SUGGESTED POLOFF NEED NOT REPORT) THAT IN EFFECT BDG IS ASKING FOR COMPENSATION FOR ITS LOSSES FROM USG RATHER THAN GOP, "WHICH IS TOO POOR."

14. MUSHTAQ AND POLOFF AGREED THAT DISCUSSION, AND ANY OTHERS WHICH MIGHT BE HELD IN FUTURE, WOULD BE CONSIDERED PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL. (MUSHTAQ TOLD ALI, "MAKE ALL THIS TOP SECRET.") HE SAID USG SHOULD USE POLOFF'S REPORT OF CONVERSATION IN ANY WAY IT THINKS BEST. IF USG WISHES CONVEY LIST OF BDG DESIRES TO GOP, IT SHOULD FEEL FREE TO DO SO IF IT BELIEVES IT WILL SERVE USEFUL PURPOSE. HE SAID HE HOPED HE COULD BE PROVIDED WITH USG REACTION TO HIS REMARKS AT EARLIEST POSSIBLE MOMENT. HE SAID HE KNEW WASHINGTON IS SOMETIMES TOO BIG TO SEE SMALL THINGS (READ BD), BUT HOPED THAT IN THIS CASE SYMPATHETIC HIGH-LEVEL ATTENTION WOULD BE FOCUSED ON 70 MILLION PEOPLE AND 55 THOUSAND SQUARE MILES OF BD.

15. MUSHTAQ EXPRESSED HOPE HE COULD MAINTAIN DIRECT CONTACT WITH POLOFF VIA HOSSAIN ALI "CONDUIT." HE SAID HE HAD AUTHORIZED NO RPT NO OTHER CHANNEL TO USG AND THAT IF HE DID SO, HE WOULD SO INFORM POLOFF. HE ADDED THAT HE AWARE THAT NUMBER OF OTHER WELL-INTENTIONED LEADERS OF BD HAD MADE CONTACT WITH USG REPS, BUT THAT THEY NOT OFFICIAL CHANNEL. HE FELT CERTAIN OTHERS HAD MADE CONTACT IN EFFORT TO GAIN GENERAL IMPRESSION OF USG POLICY. HE ASKED IF USG HAD AUTHORIZED ANYONE ELSE TO TALK TO BDG AND POLOFF RESPONDED IN NEGATIVE, SAYING HE WOULD

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INFORM MUSHTAQ WHEN AND IF DEPT. DID SO. POLOFF NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT AMERICAN OFFICIALS MIGHT ENCOUNTER BD REPS IN VARIETY OF PLACES, SUCH AS DELEGATES LOUNGE AT UN, AND THAT HE EXPECTED NORMAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WOULD TAKE PLACE. MUSHTAQ SAID THAT IS WHY HE WANTED TO GO TO UNGA; HE HAD HOPED HE WOULD FIND OCCASION THERE TO MEET SECRETARY  
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ROGERS. HOWEVER, USG HAD "KEPT HIM FROM GOING." ASKED TO ELABORATE, SINCE POLOFF HAD HEARD OF NO VISA APPLICATION FROM FOMMIN, MUSHTAQ SAID HE HAD BEEN TOLD USG WOULD FIND HIS PRESENCE IN NEW YORK HIGHLY EMBARRASSING. SINCE HE DID NOT WISH TO EMBARRASS "OUR OLD AND GREAT FRIEND," HE HAD DECIDED NOT TO GO.

16. MUSHTAQ SAID HE BELIEVED USE OF BDHC AS MEETING PLACE WAS MOST FEASIBLE FROM ALL STANDPOINTS, NOTING THAT MAJOR CONSIDERATION WAS ABILITY TO TALK "WHERE THEY (READ INDIAN INTELLIGENCE PERSONNEL) CAN'T LOOK OVER OUR SHOULDERS." (COMMENT: POLOFF'S ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE WERE HANDLED DISCREETLY. HE WAS MET AT GATE BY HOSSAIN ALI AND GAVE HIS NAME TO NO ONE ELSE. WE AGREE WITH MUSHTAQ ON DESIRABILITY OF LOCALE IN LIGHT REMARKS OF QAIYUM'S MESSENGER NOTED REFUEL. END COMMENT) IN PARTING MUSHTAQ TIGHTLY GRASPED POLOFF'S HANDS WITH BOTH HIS AND SAID, "I HOPE WE MEET AGAIN SOON. I HOPE THE UNITED STATES WILL COME TO OUR AID."

17. COMMENT: MUSHTAQ'S REMARKS WERE MUCH THE SAME AS REPORTED BY TIME CORRESPONDENT COGGIN, AND REPRESENT JUST ABOUT WHAT MIGHT BE EXPECTED FROM FIRST MEETING WITH USG REP. MUSHTAQ IMPRESSED POLOFF AS INTELLIGENT, CLEVER, PRAGMATIC, BASICALLY FRIENDLY AND REASONABLY ARTICULATE; CERTAINLY NOT AS HAZY AS REPORTED BY BRITISH MP SHORE (CALCUTTA 2435) BUT ADMITTEDLY HANDICAPPED BY INEXPERIENCE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS. HE APPARENTLY PLACES CONSIDERABLE RELIANCE ON GROUPE STAFF OF PROFESSIONAL FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICERS. IT INTERESTING THAT MUSHTAQ NEVER ADMITTED USE OF QAIYUM OR OTHERS IN NEW DELHI AS CHANNEL TO USG, THOUGH HIS COMMENTS

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IMPLIED HE HAS SOUGHT USE BOTH THOSE SOURCES AND PERHAPS OTHERS TO GATHER KNOWLEDGE ABOUT US INTENTIONS AND POLICIES, AND THAT HE OBVIOUSLY WISHES TO STEER CLEAR OF INDIANS AND SOVIETS IN ATTEMPT TO FIND SOLUTIONS. ON BASIC PURPOSE OF MEETING -- TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER BDG INTERESTED IN NEGOTIATING SETTLEMENT DIRECTLY WITH GOP -- MUSHTAQ'S STATEMENTS AND FAR-REACHING LIST OF DEMANDS REVEALED DISTINCTLY NEGATIVE POSITION. HE OBVIOUSLY SAW MEETING AS OPPORTUNITY TO TRY INVOLVE USG IN SETTLEMENT EFFORT AND POST-SETTLEMENT PROBLEMS, RATHER THAN AS CHANNEL TO GOP, DESPITE POLOFF'S EMPHASIS THAT US ROLE ONLY THAT OF LISTENER AND MESSENGER. THIS AGAIN MAY REFLECT "FIRST MEETING" SYNDROME, AND ESTABLISHMENT IN BARGAINING POSITION, BUT APART FROM HIS REFERENCE TO YAHYA AS "GOOD MAN," CONVERSATION ELICITED NO RPT NO INDICATION THAT BDG PREPARED TALK WITH GOP AT THIS STAGE. GP-2.

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# Acronyms

CENTO	: Central Treaty Organization
CIA	: Central Intelligence Agency
GHQ	: General Headquarters
KGB	: Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti or Committee for State Security (Formerly the predominant security police organization of Soviet Russia)
MNA	: Member National Assembly
MPA	: Member Provincial Assembly
NATO	: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEFA	: North-East Frontier Agency
NSC	: National Safety Council
OSA	: Optical Society of America
POW	: Prisoner of War
SEATO	: Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
U.N	: United Nations
U.S	: United States
USAID	: United States Agency for International Development
USIS	: United States Information Service
WSAG	: Washington Special Action Group

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